

THE SALAMANDRINE.

BY

CHARLES MACKAY,

AUTHOR OF "RUEDELA," "LEGENDS OF THE ISLES," ETC.

With Illustrations,

DRAWN BY JOHN GILBERT; ENGRAVED BY THE BROTHERS DALZIEL.

Listen, and I will tell you now
What never yet was heard in tale or song,
From old or modern bard, in hall or tower.

CONFIDENTIAL



LONDON :

INGRAM, COOKE, AND CO.

M.D.C.C.LIII.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

CANTO I.—*The Watch-Fire.*

No.		PAGE
I.	Thrice ten thousand men advanced, Elate with battles won, To meet the foe in mortal strife Ere rising of the sun.	1
II.	Cold and misty broke the morn Through clouds and vapours dun.	3
III.	From hour to hour the sentries pace Their round And pray that morn would come.	5
IV.	Close to the fires they gather all, To warm their freezing feet, And rub their stiff and torpid palms In the reviving heat.	6
V.	And in the fiercest of the heat He sees a youth and maiden sweet ; Unscorched amid the fire they stand.	8
VI.	“Look, look !” quoth he, “and tell me true,— Amid those flames so yellow Dost thou not see a vision bright ?”	15
VII.	A streak of radiance in the east Proclaimed the coming day, And drum and fife and bugle horn Announced the reveillé.	18
VIII.	To fight—to bleed—to groan—to die— And reap false glory out of woe.	20

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

CANTO II.—*The Soldier's Return.*

No.		PAGE
IX.	There are smiles of love on many a cheek ; Many a fond wife sobs for gladness, And sheds more tears in excess of joy Than ever she shed in all her sadness.	21
X.	The spring has followed the winter weary, And peace come after a ruthless war ; The land rejoices, and children's voices Welcome their fathers from afar.	23
XI.	The wars are over, the peasants rejoice,— Youths and maidens sit under the tree, Or dance together In sunny weather, While the elder people flock to see.	25
XII.	The rider lay on the earth alone There came a lady through the wood, Beautiful and kind was she : Loosely fell her flaxen hair, Over her shoulders clustering fair.	29
XIII.	To roam at morn each woodland scene, Or hunt the deer in forests green.	34
XIV.	 Amid excess of gladness She feels a dread—she scarce knows why— That joy must be obscured by sadness, And pleasure blossom but to die.	36

CANTO III.—*Love Betrayed.*

XV.	 Upon a flowery bank O'ercanopied by leafy arches, Formed by the intertwining boughs Of fragrant chestnut-trees and larches, They sit.	37
XVI.	Sweet wild-wood valley ! never yet Did youth so tender, maid so true, Appear by Mora's lovely stream.	39

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

No.		PAGE
XVII.	'Tis their last night, and they have gone Forth to the woodlands all alone.	41
XVIII.	So gentle is the night of May, So much the lovers have to say, They never heed the flight of time.	45
XIX.	But who is this, of stalwart frame, Who paces through the forest shade ; His looks on Gilbert turning now, And now upon the maid ? Her brother Porphyrr.	47
XX.	He's gone !—his lessening form recedes Adown the tapering wild-wood shade, And sadness with redoubled weight Falls on the spirit of the maid.	52

CANTO IV.—*Hope and Fear.*

XXI.	What can delay his tardy feet ? Long since, were he a lover meet For maid so tender and sincere, The truant would have wandered here.	53
XXII.	The bells in Minden's turrets dun Awoke a merry chime, And banners streaming to the sun Proclaimed a festal time.	55
XXIII.	Five hundred merry-hearted guests Made banquet in the hall ; And drank a health, in bumpers deep, Upstanding one and all ; With joyous shouts, repeated oft, That shook the very wall.	57
XXIV.	High from her lattice glowed a light, That shone through storms the livelong night, To guide her lover on his way ; And still she breathed his name so dear, Elate in hope or sunk in fear.	62
XXV.	He signeth parchments all day long, And wooeth Rosaline at night, And joineth in her song.	65

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

No.		PAGE
XXVI.	His sire, though old, is hale and stout ; He bustles pompously about, And thinks upon the acres wide, And the rich dowry of the bride.	66
XXVII.	His mother she prepares the feast, Great stores of venison and wine, And foaming ale, and rich conserves, That a thousand guests may dine.	67
XXVIII.	Behold the applauding peasants come, And maskers with the fife and drum.	69
XXIX.	And troops of laughing cottage girls, With roses gleaming through their curls, White-robed, in many a band advance, To tread the mazes of the dance, And strew with early flowers the grass Where Youth and Love and Passion pass.	70
XXX.	And lo, they come !—the blushing bride Leaning all fondly on his side.	71
XXXI.	<i>Tailpiece.</i>	72

CANTO V.—The Bridal Feast.

XXXII.	In old Minden's lordly mansion Shall be revelry to-night.	73
XXXIII.	His mother, richly vested, Sits majestic in the hall, Greeting every guest that enters To the gallant festival.	75
XXXIV.	The doors flew open all,— And lo ! a lady, mild and bright, With rustling robes of silvery white, Came gliding through the hall.	81
XXXV.	Sir Gilbert knelt upon the grass, And struggled hard to speak ; He clasped his hands and bowed his head, And tears bedewed his cheek.	91
XXXVI.	He thought he heard, as he swooned away, A voice like Amethysta's.	96

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

CANTO VI.—*The Doom.*

No.		PAGE
XXXVII.	His face was pale, his back was bent, And he tottered ever as he went Upon his weary way.	97
XXXVIII.	Men hooted at him as he passed, The children left their play, While lonely women barred their doors, And dogs flew out to bay.	99
XXXIX.	She could not brook the piercing look Of that man so pale and old,— She shrank affrighted from the touch Of his clammy hands so cold; And, sore afraid, she called for aid As to her robes he clung, For madness glittered in his eye, Though love was on his tongue.	103
XL.	In each lank, shrivelled, clawlike hand She bore aloft a flaming brand: In her eyes, fire—in her track, light, She rushed upon their dazzled sight, And waved her torches to and fro, With shout and yell, with thrust and blow.	112

CANTO VII.—*The Triumph of Love.*

XLI.	The witchlike woman, pale and old, Above him, drooping, hung.	113
XLII.	“Alas!” said she, “my voice is weak, And I am frail and old, And all the day and every night I perish with the cold. Behold the embers on the floor, They faint and flicker evermore.”	115
XLIII.	He took the axe, and wandered forth Amid the woodland shades, And gathered branches as he went, Wind-scattered in the glades: And bore them on his weary back Through wilds unfurrowed by a track.	121

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

No.		PAGE
XLIV.	He read the epitaphs inscribed On each funereal stone, ... And he started with a sudden awe To stand before his own.	129
XLV.	 The gay procession came,— 'He could not tell the bridegroom's name ; But the blushing bride—he knew her well— 'Twas not his sister Amadel— Paler and paler grew his cheek, As he gazed on Rosaline.	131
XLVI.	 Old traditions say The maiden perished on her bridal day.	140



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CONT -



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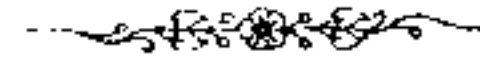
INGRAM, COOKE, AND CO.

M.C.C.LIII.





INTRODUCTION.



IN the Rosierucian romance of the *Count de Gabalis, or Conversations upon the Secret Sciences*, by the Abbé de Villars,—a volume to which the world is indebted for the aerial personages of the *Rapê of the Lock*, as well as for many graceful fancies in English and German literature,—occur the following passages :—

“When you shall be enrolled among the children of the philosophers,” says the Count de Gabalis to his incredulous but inquiring disciple, “you will discover that the elements are inhabited by very holy creatures, whom, in consequence of the sin of unhappy Adam, his too unhappy posterity have been forbidden to see or know. The immense space that is between earth and heaven possesses inhabitants much more noble than the birds and gnats merely; the vast oceans have many more dwellers than the dolphins and the whales; the depth of the earth is not created only for the moles; and the element of fire, more noble than the other three, was not made to remain void.

“The air is full of an innumerable multitude of creatures of the human form, great lovers of the sciences, subtle, benevolent to the wise, but enemies of the stupid and ignorant. Their wives and their daughters are of bold and masculine beauty, such as painters have represented the Amazons.

“Know also that the seas and the rivers are as fully inhabited as the air; the wise ancients have mentioned these populations under the name of Undines or nymphs. There are few males among them, but vast numbers of females; their beauty is extreme, and the daughters of men are not to be compared to them.

“The earth is filled nearly to the centre by Gnomes, people of small stature, guardians of the treasures of the mines and quarries. The latter are ingenious, friends of mankind, and easy to command. They furnish the children of the wise with all the money that they require, and ask little for their service, except the glory of being commanded. The Gnomides, their wives, are small, but very agreeable, and their costume is very curious.

“As regards the Salamanders, inhabitants of the region of fire, they serve the philosophers; but they do not wish or seek their company with much eagerness; and their daughters and their wives rarely allow themselves to be seen. The wives of the Salamanders are beautiful, and in

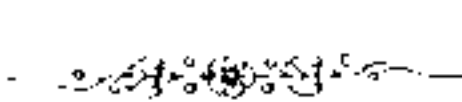
INTRODUCTION.

fact more beautiful than all the others, because they are of a purer element. I pass over the description of these people, because, when one of us, you will see them yourself at leisure, and easily if you have the curiosity. You will see their costumes, their modes of living, their manners, their policy, their admirable laws. You will be charmed with the beauty of their minds, even more than with that of their bodies ; but you will not be able to refrain from pity when they tell you that their souls are mortal, and that they have no hope of the eternal enjoyment of divine felicity, in the presence of that supreme Being whom they know, and whom they religiously adore. They will tell you that being composed of the purest particles of the element which they inhabit, and having no contrary qualities in them, as they are made of but one element, they do not die till after many centuries : but what is time compared to eternity ? They return at last into eternal nothingness ; and this thought so afflicts them, that the philosophers have much trouble in consoling them.

“Our fathers being true philosophers, and speaking to God face to face, complained to Him of the wretched fate of these people ; and God, whose mercy is illimitable, remembered Him that it was not impossible to find a remedy for this evil. He made known to them that in the same manner as man, by the alliance which he has contracted with God, has been made a participator of the divinity ; so the Sylphs, the Gnomes, the Nymphs, and the Salamanders, by the alliance which they may contract with man, can be made participators of man's immortality. Thus a Nymph or a Sylphide becomes immortal, and capable of the bliss to which we aspire, when she is happy enough to marry one of the ‘wise ;’ and a Gnome or a Sylph ceases to be mortal from the moment that he marries one of the daughters of men.”

This quotation will suffice to shew whence the author derived the idea of the Salamandrine. When the poem, if he may be permitted to give it so high a name, was first issued in a very small and unadorned edition, it had the good fortune to be received with very general favour. It is hoped that the present edition will not be less acceptable, enhanced as it is by the beautiful designs of Mr. Gilbert.

London, December 1852.



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XLVI.	 Old traditions say The maiden perished on her bridal day.	140





Canta First.

THE WATCH-FIRE.

Can any mortal mixture of earth's mould
Breathe such divine, enchanting ravishment?

COMUS.

Mark what radiant state she spreads,
Shooting her beams like silver threads;—

This, this is she alone,
Sitting like a goddess bright
In the centre of her light.

MILTON'S 'ARCADES.'



THE WATCH-FIRE.

I.

COLD and misty broke the morn
Through clouds and vapours dun,
When thrice ten thousand men advanced,
Elate with battles won,
To meet the foe in mortal strife
Ere rising of the sun.

II.

Short was the day, but ere its light
Had faded from the west,
Ten thousand men lay cold and dead
On earth's enshrouding breast;
And the snow where passed those angry hosts,

THE WATCH-FIRE.

So virgin white before,
Was trodden black by prancing horse,
Or dyed with human gore.

III.

And now 'tis night,—and chill and bleak
The wind goes moaning forth ;
Cold, bitter cold, the stars shine out
From the clear and frosty north ;
And crisp and brittle to the tread
Is the weary waste of snow :
Poor sad survivors of the fight !
How shall they pass this wintry night,
And brave the blasts that blow ?

IV.

From hour to hour the sentries pace
Their round, with blue, cold, shrunken face,
And pray that morn would come
Before its customary time ;
Or ere their tongues grow stiff and dumb,
Or ere their very eyes congeal :
For the sharp winds pierce into their flesh,
Like javelins of steel.

V.

The forest-trees, at break of morn,
Stood proudly every one ;
The hoar-frost on their leafless boughs
Shone brightly in the sun.

THE WATCH-FIRE.



Now here and there upon the earth
Their trunks extended lie,
To feed with logs the beacon-fires
That pour their smoke on high ;
And merrily they burn and crack,
And flush the wintry sky.

VI.

The shivering remnant of the host
Is gathered round about,

THE WATCH-FIRE.



Faint with the fighting of that day,
Or wounded in the rout.
Close to the fires they gather all,
To warm their freezing feet,
And rub their stiff and torpid palms
In the reviving heat;
And ever and anon they raise,
With joyous shouts, the smouldering blaze,
To scare away the wolves that yell
By the outposts of the sentinel,

THE WATCH-FIRE.

And the birds obscene that croak and jar,
And snuff the carnage from afar.

VII.

And one fire, brighter than the rest,
Is piled with chumps of oak,
And weaves fantastic to the sky
Blue wreaths of curling smoke.
Five score men are stretched around;
So weary worn are they,
They could not sleep a sounder sleep
If on eider-down they lay,
With sheets and blankets white as milk,
And sheltering draperies of silk.

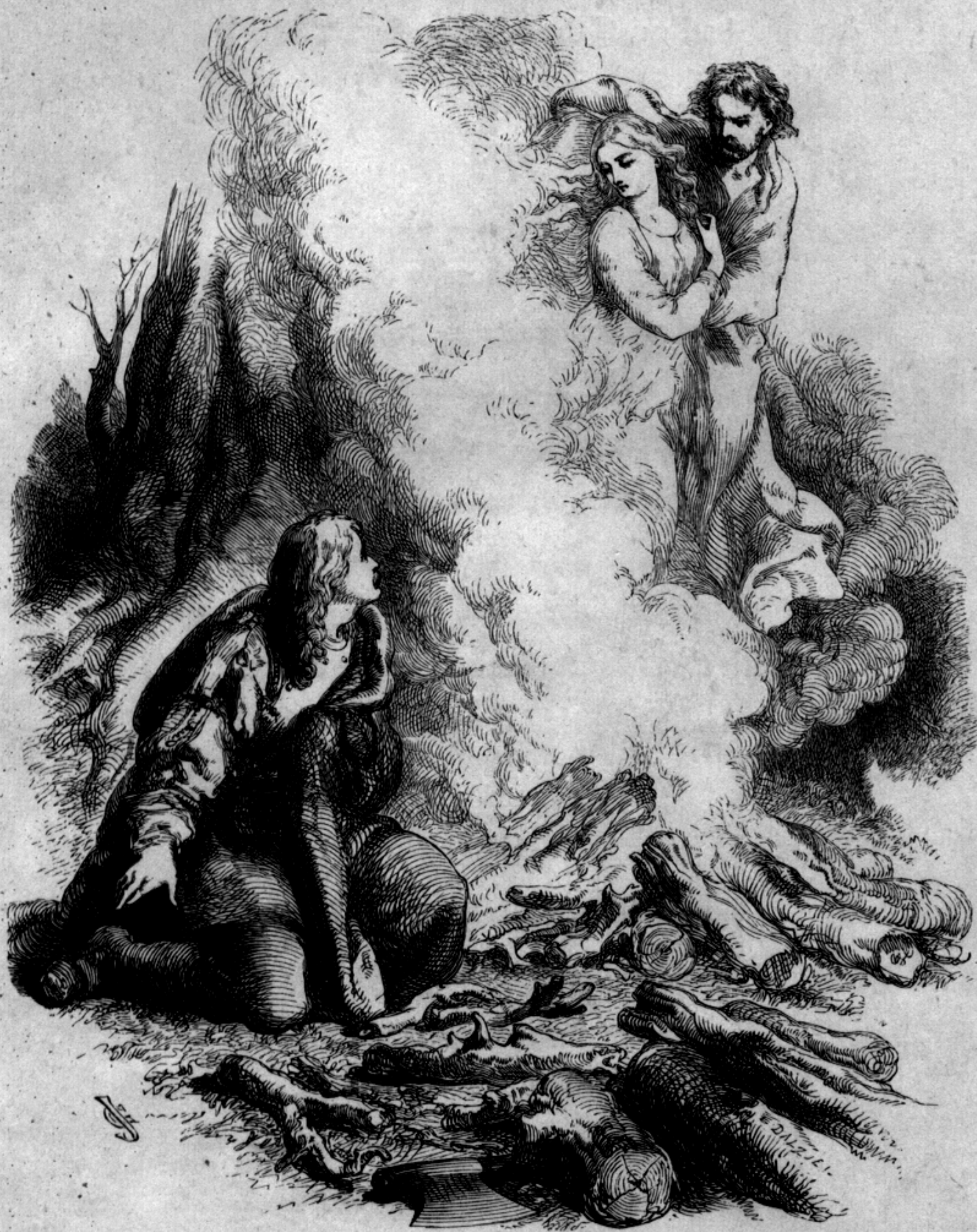
VIII.

Sir Gilbert, captain of the band,
Lies slumbering with the rest,
On the cold damp ground,
With his mantle round,
And his hands upon his breast.
And he is young and fair and proud,
And the name his fathers bore
Was never stained by sire or son,
Or any that came before.

IX.

He hath a vision in his sleep:
His eyes seem closed in slumber deep,

THE WATCH-FIRE.



But through the smoke he sees the stars,
And he can hear the flames that roar,
As in mimic strife they meet and twist,
Curl and uncurl, combine, resist,
And glide and mingle as before.

THE WATCH-FIRE.

X.

And in the fiercest of the heat
He sees a youth and maiden sweet ;
Unscorched amid the fire they stand,
And hold each other by the hand :
The harmless flames around them play,
In hues of purple, gold, and gray ;—
They mount, they fall, they leap, they twine—
And then in showers, like scattered wine,
Rose-red, the glancing sparks descend,
As the bright pair toward him bend ;
While he looks on with lips asunder,
Holding his breath in fear and wonder.

XI.

Oh, richly fell the flaxen hair
Over the maiden's shoulders fair !
On every feature of her face
Sat radiant modesty and grace ;
Her tender eyes were mild and bright,
And through her robes of shadowy white
The delicate outline of her form
Shone like an iris through a storm.

XII.

The other was of sterner mould :
A frown of melancholy pride
Made him less lovely to behold
Than the maiden at his side ;

THE WATCH-FIRE.

But on his brow, beseeming well,
Sat majesty ineffable :
He looked a demigod sublime,
Or a Titan of the olden time.

XIII.

Sir Gilbert gazed upon the flames,
But could not speak for fear :
Was he awake ? was he asleep ?—
He saw the moon shine clear ;
He saw the steadfast woods around,
And his sleeping comrades near ;—
And still before his wondering sight
The watch-fire mounted high,
And formed above their radiant heads
A smokeless canopy.

XIV.

At their feet the embers glittered fair,
Like rich carbuncles with topaz set.
Was he awake ? He doubted yet.
Was it a murmuring in the air ?
No :—'twas the maiden's voice he heard :
He could distinguish every word ;—
Gentle and soft, like music's tone
When the notes are saddest and best known.

XV.

“O brother ! I could weep for ever
For all the sorrow that I see !

THE WATCH-FIRE.

Poor suffering man !
How short his span !
And yet how full of misery !
See how they struggle—how they die—
How they deform the pleasant lands,
And in their brothers' blood imbrue
Their mercenary hands !
The crowds that slumber at our feet
Await but morning, to repeat
The guilt of yesterday, and wield
The bloody sword in battle-field ;
Or, drunk with slaughter, light their torch
At cottage-roof or city-porch ;
And in one luckless day of time
Compress a century of crime."

XVI.

" Sweet Amethysta, vain thy grief ;
And weep not thou for human woe :
Have we not sorrows of our own,
For which our bitterest tears should flow ?
A greater anguish who can know,
A greater sum of agonies,
Than to have a soul that dies ?—
Like the perishing body mortal,
Ne'er to reach the glorious portal
Leading to the awful Throne
Where the Eternal sits alone ;—
With power and will to worship God,
Yet to be smitten by His rod

Into nothingness for ever !
Worse even than hell itself, and woe relenting never !

XVII.

“ Weep not, O sister, for mankind !—
Although so wicked, frail, and blind ;
Although they murder one the other,
And each is foeman of his brother ;
Although for colour or for creed
Their daily hecatombs may bleed ;
Although the elder and the younger
Are born to sorrow, pain, and hunger,
And countless miseries crowd their span,—
I would that Heaven had made me man !

XVIII.

“ O thou Sun, that beamest high,
Even thou shalt fade and die ;
But these—poor earthworms though they be—
Shall perish never,
But flourish beautiful and bright,
When thou and worlds that drink thy light
Are quenched for ever and for ever.”

XIX.

“ True, O brother : what suffices
Length of years or sum of joy,—
That no human care or anguish,
Cold or hunger, can annoy,—

THE WATCH-FIRE.

That for centuries of youth
We can feed on heavenly truth?
We die! we die!
Banned from the sky:
We die, we die, we die!—alas, alas, we die!”

XX.

Sir Gilbert rose upon his arm,
And still the accents, sad and sweet,
Filled the clear air,—“We die, we die!”
His heart was throbbing—he heard it beat.
Was he awake? Ay, broad awake:—
He saw the fire still upward wreathing,
He saw the glorious moon aloft,
He heard his fellow-soldier breathing,
He felt the cold blast on his cheek—
“Alas,” said he, “my brain is weak!”
And then he pressed it with his palm,
And closed his weary eyes;
But still he heard the mournful strain
Amid the silence rise:

XXI.

“What though a thousand years may be
No more than half our span,
And only threescore years and ten
The time ordained for man,—
Yet he is happier far than we,
Proud heir of Immortality!

For we, alas!
Fade like the grass,
Or like the fitful breath of summer,
Or the tone of a melancholy song,
Or an oilless taper's flickering ray,—
Alas, more mortal ev'n than they!
With spring the grass is a fresh new comer—
The sweet west wind returns ere long—
The flame, though it seem extinguished quite,
May be restored to a living light;
The song, though it cease, may re-awaken,
Re-attuned to a pleasant strain;—
But when we die, we die for ever!
Never—oh, never, we live again!"

XXII.

Once more Sir Gilbert started up,
And roused his slumbering fellow:
"Look, look!" quoth he, "and tell me true,—
Amid those flames so yellow
Dost thou not see a vision bright?
Dost thou not hear a voice of sorrow?"
His comrade laughed,—"Thy head is light,
Go sleep—thou wilt be well to-morrow."

XXIII.

"Oh, shield me, Heaven!—but this is strange!
There are the two fair forms before me;—
I wake, I feel, I think, I speak,—
This is no vision floating o'er me;

THE WATCH-FIRE.



Or if it be, no dream ideal
Ever on earth was half so real.
Hark!—the voices once again!—
Oh, what melody of pain!—
Oh, what music in their sorrow!—
Perhaps my brain is light—I may be well to-morrow.”

THE WATCH-FIRE.

XXIV.

Thus communing with himself,
He gazed upon that wondrous fire :
Now it darkled
Roared, and sparkled—
Now it sank—now mounted higher ;
And still the youth and maiden fair
Shone amid the flames, unburning ;
Still their voices, melancholy,
Rose upon the midnight air,
Ceasing now, and now returning,
Soft, melodious, full, and clear ;
Till he held his panting breath
In delight and fear.

XXV.

“ O happy, happy man ! ”
Thus the maiden sang,
“ At thy birth the heavens were glad,
And hosannas rang.
Make us sharers in thy gain,—
Oh, take pity on our pain !
And to our perishing souls impart
The immortality of thine,
For which through darkening years we ever yearn and pine.”

XXVI.

Sir Gilbert felt his inmost heart
Warming with pity for their woe,—

THE WATCH-FIRE.

“ Most fair, most melancholy things,
Tell me the sorrow that ye know.”
He spoke, communing with himself,
But gave the inward thought no breath :
“ What is it ye require of man,
To be delivered from the ban
Of this eternal death ?”

XXVII.

There came an answer to his thought,
Soft as a breeze amid the grass ;
It was the maiden's voice that sang
Mournfully still—“ Alas, alas !
We die, we die !
The flowerets of the plain,
Imbibing colours from the sky,
Are happier than we ;
They live, and love, and feel no pain ;
But joy is not for us and ours,
We are more fragile than the flowers ;—
For us no bliss in earth, or heaven above,
Unless, O man ! thou'lt pity us, and love !”

XXVIII.

And then the chorus rose again,
But louder than before ;
The forest-trees bowed down their heads
With age and winter hoar,

THE WATCH-FIRE.



And a murmur through their leafless boughs
Most musically swept ;
And the rough cold winds began to sing,
And soft as breezes crept.

THE WATCH-FIRE.

The air, the sky, the very stars,
The pale and waning moon,
All seemed with one accord to join
The sweet entrancing tune ;
And the burden of it seemed to be—
“ Oh, love is chief felicity !
To man on earth—to sprites above—
Chief felicity is love !”

XXIX.

At last the echoes died away ;
And when Sir Gilbert looked again,
The flames had sunk, and clouds of smoke
Were curling up amain :
A streak of radiance in the east
Proclaimed the coming day,
And drum and fife and bugle-horn
Announced the reveillé.

XXX.

“ Alas !” quoth he, “ what this may be
Surpasses me to tell ;
But this I say, to my dying day
I shall remember well.”
And now the drums beat loud again,
And trumps heroic blow ;
Each man of all that host is up,
And marching o’er the snow,

THE WATCH-FIRE.

To meet, ere setting of the sun,
The legions of the foe ;—
To fight—to bleed—to groan—to die—
And reap false glory out of woe.



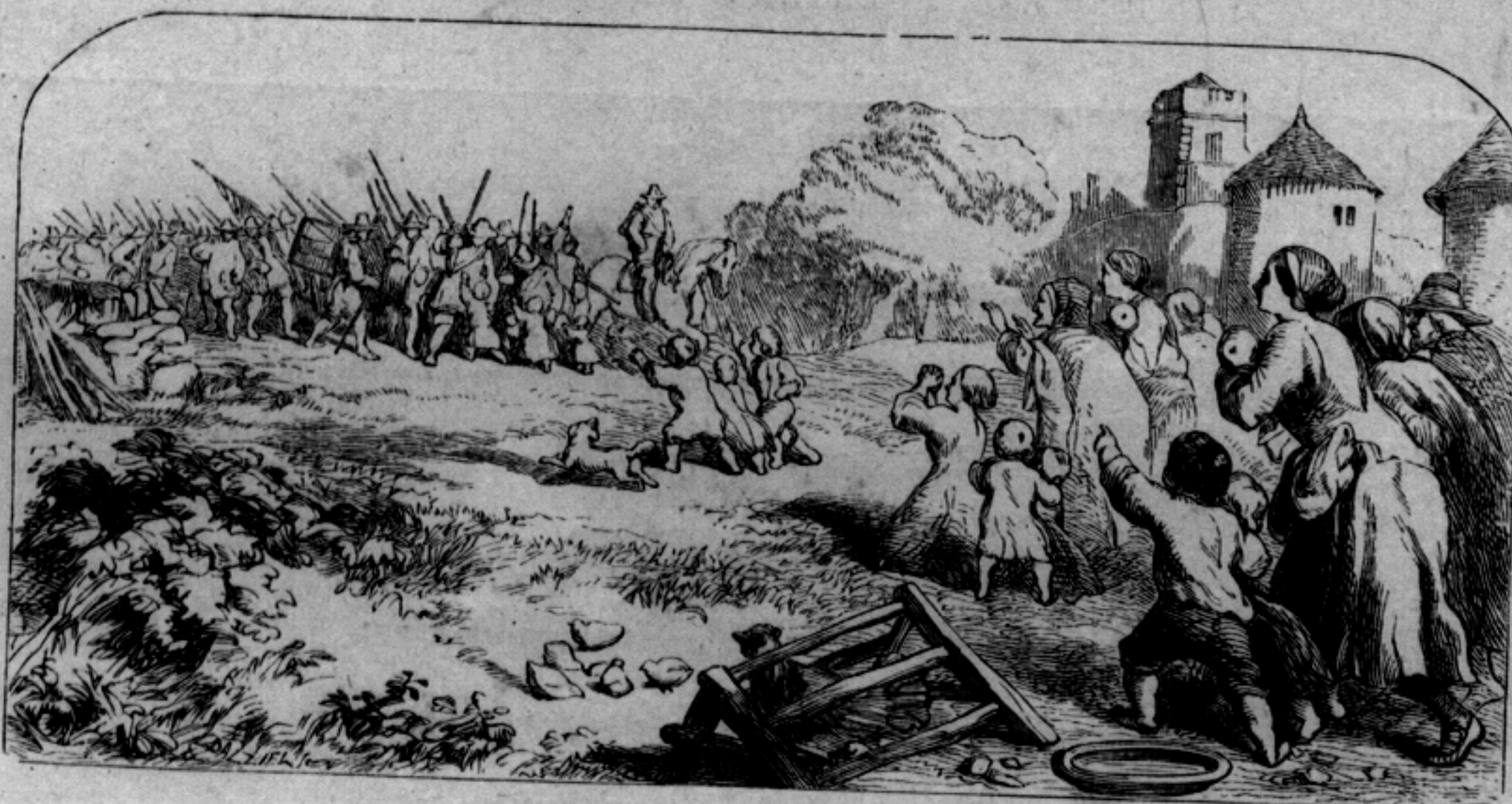


Canto Second.

THE SOLDIER'S RETURN.

Through the forest I have gone —
Night and silence ! who is here,
On the dank and dirty ground ?

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.



THE SOLDIER'S RETURN.

I.

THE meadows gleam with early flowers,
It is the month of May;
The swallow in the cottage eaves
Has built her nest of clay,
And the rooks upon the castle tower
Caw merrily all the day.

II.

The spring has followed the winter weary,
And peace come after a ruthless war;
The land rejoices, and children's voices
Welcome their fathers from afar.
There are smiles of love on many a cheek;
Many a fond wife sobs for gladness,
And sheds more tears in excess of joy
Than ever she shed in all her sadness.

THE SOLDIER'S RETURN.

III.

The wars are over,—the peasants rejoice,—
Youths and maidens sit under the tree,
Or dance together
In sunny weather,
While the elder people flock to see.
The rustic pipe makes music simple,
To guide the fall of their twirling feet;
And young veins tingle,
As love-looks mingle,
And youth and passion their vows repeat.

IV.

And Gilbert journeys to his home :
Many a laurel he hath won,—
And he hopes to reach his father's halls
Ere the rising of the sun.
The evening air is mild and cool,
The round May-moon is at her full,
And ever, as he rides along,
He hums the chorus of a song ;
Anon he walks his chestnut steed,—
Amble, or gallops at full speed,—
And then he stops, for better view
Of the green hills or waters blue,
Or the broad path he must pursue.

V.

All day there was a gentle breeze—
It shook no blossom from the trees,

THE SOLDIER'S RETURN.



So lightly did it pass ;
But now it blows a freshening gale :—
Hark ! how it murmurs in the grass,
And moans among the oak-tree tops,
And the loose willows of the copse :—

And lo! upõn the western sky
The clouds are gathering fast and high.

VI.

And still the careless cavalier
Goes loitering on his way ;
One who hath borne the winter cold
For a month, both night and day,
Need fear no rage of vernal storm
In the merry month of May :
So leisurely he still rides on,
And hums his roundelay.

VII.

The rain-drops patter on the leaves
Of the topmost branches small ;
The fragrance from the moistened grass
Floats gently over all ;
And the dust emits a perfume sweet
Where the dancing rain-drops fall.

VIII.

The moon is veiled behind the cloud,
The angry tempest shouts aloud,
The rain pours down as if it burst
From oceans floating in the air ;
And on the forehead of the Dark
The lightning waves its fiery hair ;
And Heaven to Earth in thunder calls,
And shakes her subterranean halls.

THE SOLDIER'S RETURN.

IX.

The charger snorts and pricks his ear:—
'Tis vain to speed, O cavalier,
There is no place of shelter near,
Except the forest glades;
And better the plain, with its drenching rain,
Than perilous green-wood shades:
For the venomous lightning loves to launch
Its bolts on the sheltering oak-tree branch;
So bear the storm as best you may,
And keep your steed on the beaten way.

X.

Hark! how the wind goes moaning past—
The rain comes flooding on the blast,
The brooks and streamlets roar and leap,
And meadow-paths are ankle deep,
And in the roads are pools to ford
Up to the charger's girth;
And darkness deep and tempest strong
Are lords of air and earth.
Dark?—It is clearer than the day,
A sudden flash illumines the way;
And the war-horse, startled at the sight,
Plunges and gallops in wild affright.

XI.

Fear, though blind, is swift and strong:
Over the dyke he bounds along,

THE SOLDIER'S RETURN.

Over the ditch, and over the stile,
And away through the meadows many a mile;—
No rider, were he ever so good,
Could govern a steed in so wild a mood.
And away, away, away they go,
Faster than ever a flying foe
Scoured o'er the land from a host pursuing:
And the mad wind snaps the stubborn trees,
Their path with clouds of flying leaves and broken branches strewing.
Till at last, all white with foam,
And worn by speed and fear,
The war-horse stumbles on the earth
With his luckless cavalier.

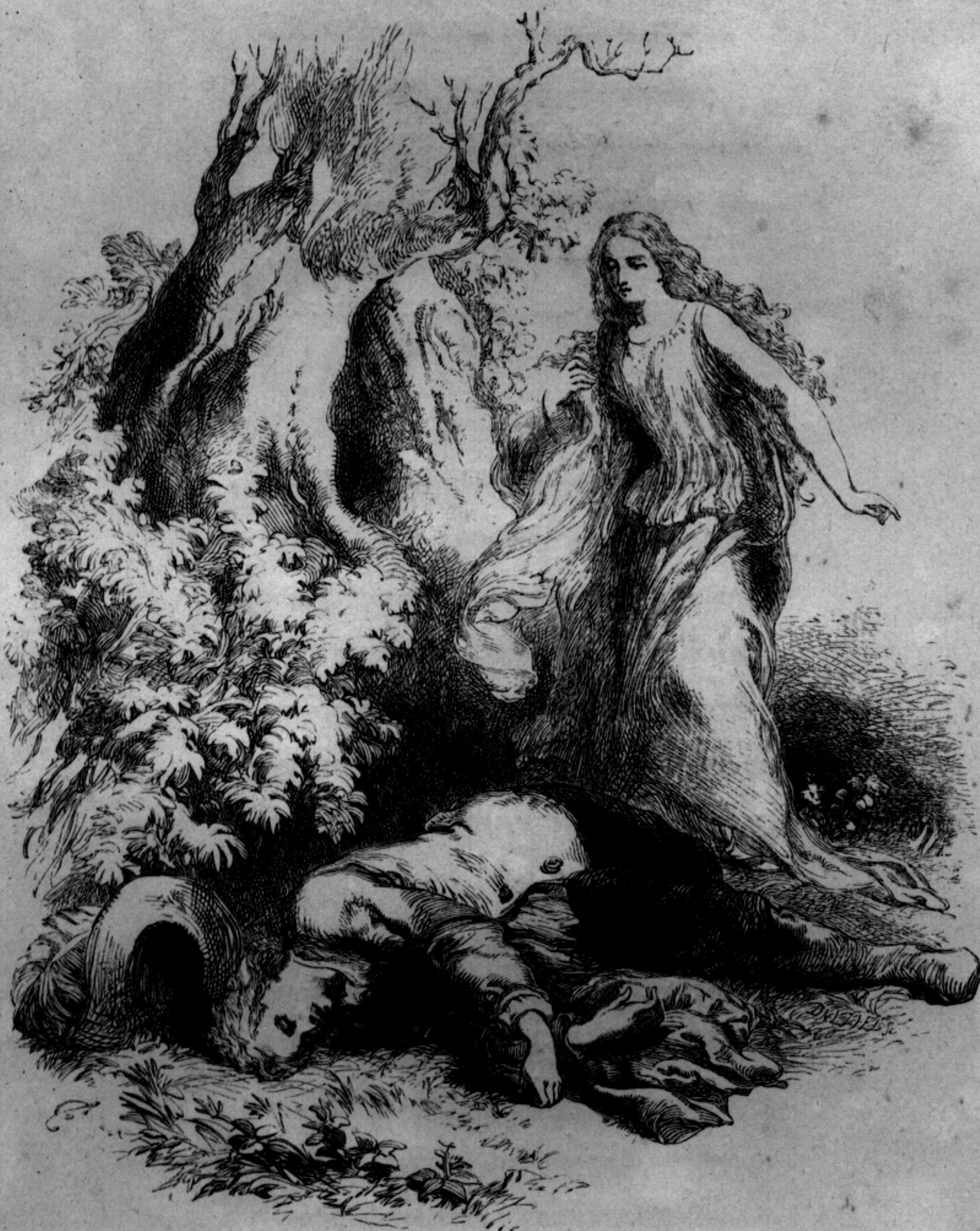
XII.

It rose unhurt—looked wildly round,
And was off again with a sudden bound;
Tossing about on the wide wet plain
Like a rudderless ship on the stormy main:
And the rider lay on the earth alone,
Under a bank of furze and stone.
Was he alive? 'twere hard to tell;
But if he were, he slumbered well,
To sorrow and pain insensible.

XIII.

There came a lady through the wood;
Beautiful and kind was she:
Loosely fell her flaxen hair,
Over her shoulders clustering fair,—

THE SOLDIER'S RETURN.



Her azure eyes were mild and bright,—
Her rustling robes were silvery white,—
Her foot-fall delicate and light ;
And an angel might have stooped to see,
And blessed her for her purity.

THE SOLDIER'S RETURN.

XIV.

The rain that on her ringlets fell
Rolled off like drops of dew,
And the loud wind sank upon the bank,
As she, with soft and modest eyes,
Kindling with pity and surprise,
Towards the horseman drew.

XV.

She knelt beside him on the ground,
And put her hand upon his heart;
She felt his breath upon her cheek,
And then arose with sudden start,
And parted from her throbbing brow
The flowing locks that o'er it fell,
And gazed upon his pallid face, as if she knew it well.

XVI.

How long he lay, he never could say;
But he saw the moonlight, silvery gray,
Tinting the hill-tops far away,
As the gentle lady o'er him bent,
Most beautiful and innocent.

XVII.

"Do I behold the heavenly spheres?"
With low and fainting voice said he;
"Is this the place of blessed rest?
Is this an angel that I see,
Bending so brightly over me?"

And as his words in murmurs died,
The pitying maid responsive sighed.

XVIII.

A little brooklet, wondrous clear,
Came trickling down the bank ;
She made her hands a drinking cup,
And twice with water filled them up,
And twice Sir Gilbert drank :
And a grateful man was he, and pressed
Her timid fingers to his breast.

XIX.

He thought he knew that beauteous face—
That kindling smile—that form of grace,
But could not think where they had met ;—
Yet who, once seeing, could forget ?
Alas ! his thoughts were roving yet !
But this he knew,—’twas bliss to be
Beside a maid so fair as she.

XX.

He looked his thanks, but could not speak ;
He rose, but he was faint and weak.
“ Rest on my arm,” the lady said ;
“ Hushed is the blast, the storm has passed,
The rain has ceased, the sky is clear.
My brother and I are dwellers here ;
He is a hunter of the deer ;

THE SOLDIER'S RETURN.

Our little cot is through the wood,
And thou shalt share our humble food
And sheltering roof till dawn of day;—
I'll be thy guide, and lead the way."

XXI.

He leaned upon her gentle arm,
Through fresh, rain-dripping forest glades;
He, fairest youth in all the land,
And she, most beautiful of maids.
Emerging from the darkening shades,
She led the way through beechen bowers,
By many a green sequestered nook,
And over meadows gemmed with flowers,
Down to the margin of a brook,
And up a narrow bridle road,
To the lone cot where she abode.

XXII.

It stood upon the mountain side,
Its porch with honeysuckle shaded;
Its windows screened from summer suns
By clustering ivy, bird-invaded;
Embowered 'mid odorous apple-trees,
Acacias rich, and beech and holly,
With willows scattered here and there,
Trailing their boughs for melancholy.

XXIII.

Her brother gave them welcome fair,
With courteous speech and tender care,

THE SOLDIER'S RETURN.

And bade him stay, their home to share,
Until his strength was quite restored :
And then he trimmed his evening lamp,
And placed their supper on the board ;
Sweet oaten cakes, and flesh of deer,
And fruits, the earliest of the year :—
The wine the smiling maiden poured ;—
And oft they pressed their wondering guest,
And smoothed a couch where he might rest.

XXIV.

Ah, Gilbert! when the morning dawned
Thou wert a love-entangled boy ;
One glance of Amethysta's eyes
Shot through thy heart delirious joy.
Little of thine ancient halls,
Little of thy father's care,
Little of thy mother's love,
Little of thy sisters fair,—
Little of thy bride betrothed,
Waiting for thee all day long,—
Didst thou heed when she was near :
Her smile was rapture to thy soul,
Her voice was music to thine ear.

XXV.

Short is long time to loving hearts,
And so he lingered many a day ;
And still with hospitable thought
The brother urged his guest to stay,



To roam at morn each woodland scene,
Or hunt the deer in forests green ;
And still the maid so gently smiled,
That not beguiling, she beguiled,
And joined, though silent, in the prayer,
That he another night would share
Their humble roof and simple fare.

THE SOLDIER'S RETURN.

XXVI.

But Gilbert was no hunter born,
He took no joy in hound or horn;
And no delight had he to climb
The rugged peak or crag sublime,
To chase the deer or mountain roe:
Far more congenial to his mind,
When stars shone clear and winds blew low,
To wander with a maiden sweet,
And breathe love-raptures at her feet.

XXVII.

So Porphyry hunted by himself,
And left the maid to Gilbert's care;
Ah, well their hearts employed the time!
He passionate, and she most fair.
Love was his theme from morn to night,
And what he spoke 'twas joy to hear;
And many a vow they interchanged
That they would hold each other dear;
And he was warm, and she sincere,
And both were happy all day long,
From morning tide till even song:—
And nightly love was still the theme
Of many a wish and many a dream.

XXVIII.

Alas for youth, alas for truth,
That Time his course will never stay!
And that his touch, however light,

THE SOLDIER'S RETURN.

Is always sure to brush away
Some pleasure, that can never more
Return as freshly as before!—
Even now, amid excess of gladness,
She feels a dread—she scarce knows why—
That joy must be obscured by sadness,
And pleasure blossom but to die.





Canto Third.

LOVE BETRAYED.

Good night! good night! parting is such sweet sorrow,
That I shall say 'good night' till it be morrow.

ROMEO, AND JULIET.



LOVE BETRAYED.

I.

'Tis their last night, and they have gone
Forth to the woodlands all alone.
Sweet wild-wood valley! never yet
Did youth so tender, maid so true,
Appear by Mora's lovely stream,
Or roam thy green recesses through.
Silent they walk, but all the while
Their mutual eyes those secrets tell
That speech might strive, and still in vain,
To render or disclose so well.

LOVE BETRAYED.

II.

Ah, little does the maid suspect
That love may dwindle to neglect;
Or that men live who take a joy
To treat a woman as a toy,—
A lovely but inferior creature,
Admired for grace of form, or feature;
With doating passion sought one day,
And on the morrow cast away.
Was he like these? ah, never! never!
No falsehood should their hearts dissever!—
Confiding still, she thought no ill,
But gave her soul to him for ever!

III.

“O Sun! awakener of care,
Withhold thy dawning light;
O Moon! the lover’s planet fair,
Prolong the hours of night!”
Thus prays the passion-stricken boy,
Extravagant and fond:
The maid as loving, but more coy,
Would willingly respond,
“How fast the moments fade away!
Oh, how unwelcome is the day!”
But lest her speech might seem too bold,
She leaves the loving thought untold.

IV.

At length, upon a flowery bank,
O’creanopied by leafy arches,

LOVE BETRAYED.



Formed by the intertwining boughs
Of fragrant chestnut-trees and larches,
They sit; the nightingale the while
Singing, as if from every feather
In all its frame it poured the notes;
And thus the pair discourse together:

V.

“ Old stories tell that men are fickle,
False and fickle every one,
And that love by guile untainted
Never dwelt beneath the sun.
Great in sorrow, strong in danger,
Must his pure affection prove,
Who would hope to win for ever
Maiden's passion, woman's love.”

VI.

“ O Amethysta, best beloved !
Since first thine eyes upon me shone,
My soul has had no other joy
Than love of thee, and thee alone :
No other passion shall it own ;
And be the doubt for ever far !
Thee at my side, whate'er betide,
In vain the envious world shall war ;
I'll love thee still,
Through good, through ill,
My light, my life, my guiding star !”

VII.

“ And couldst thou, Gilbert, for my sake
Endure the freezing looks of scorn ?
If slander's tongue should do me wrong,
And pride should call me lowly born,
Wouldst thou, as now, repeat thy vow,
Nor prove for vanity forsworn ?”

VIII.

“ Ah, never ! Envy may defame,
And men may censure if they will ;
Thy virtue shall disprove their blame,
And Gilbert will adore thee still.
No rancorous tongue shall work thee ill ;
And pride itself, O maiden mine,
Shall bow to worth so high as thine ;
And envy with a sigh confess
Thy least of charms—thy loveliness.”

IX.

“ And couldst thou (oh, forgive the fear—
Fond as a woman’s fear should be !)—
Couldst thou endure, not scorn alone,
But scorn and poverty for me ?
Couldst thou, for Amethysta’s sake,
Renounce the honours, thine by birth,—
The wealth, the titles, and the power,
And all that men most prize on earth ;
And dwell in our secluded cot,
By all thy former friends forgot,
And never chide me or repine
That I consented to be thine ?”

X.

“ No, Amethysta ! poor the heart
That veers as fortune’s currents blow ;
And mine shall be a nobler part—
My true affection shall not know

Change or decrease, or ever cease
To prize thee best of all below.
Love, like the beacon on the sea
That warns the tempest-beaten bark,
Still shines, if true, like mine for thee,
The brightest when the sky is dark !”

XI.

Thus as they speak his fingers play
Amid her soft luxuriant tresses,
Their cheeks with mutual blushes burn,
Their tender eyes exchange caresses.
So gentle is the night of May,
So much the lovers have to say,
They never heed the flight of time ;
And it is far towards the hour
When sounds the matin chime,
Ere from their sheltering forest bower,
And bank with early flowers bestrewn,
They rise, and think they rise too soon,
And see the modest eastern sky
Blushing because the morn draws nigh,
And hear the woods and welkin ringing
With the sweet song the lark is singing.

XII.

“ Oh, light the touch of time has been,
And flowers his hand has carried,
Or thus all night in forests green
Our feet would not have tarried.



We have outwatched the moon, my love,
And all the stars but one;
There is no need that we should part
For rising of the sun.

The air so full of odours sweet,
The breeze-encircled hill,
The music of the early birds,
And thy sweet looks and sweeter words,
Invite to linger still."

The maid looked up into his face
With eyes, he thought, that dimmed the day,
And the reply upon her lips
Melted in happy smiles away.

XIII.

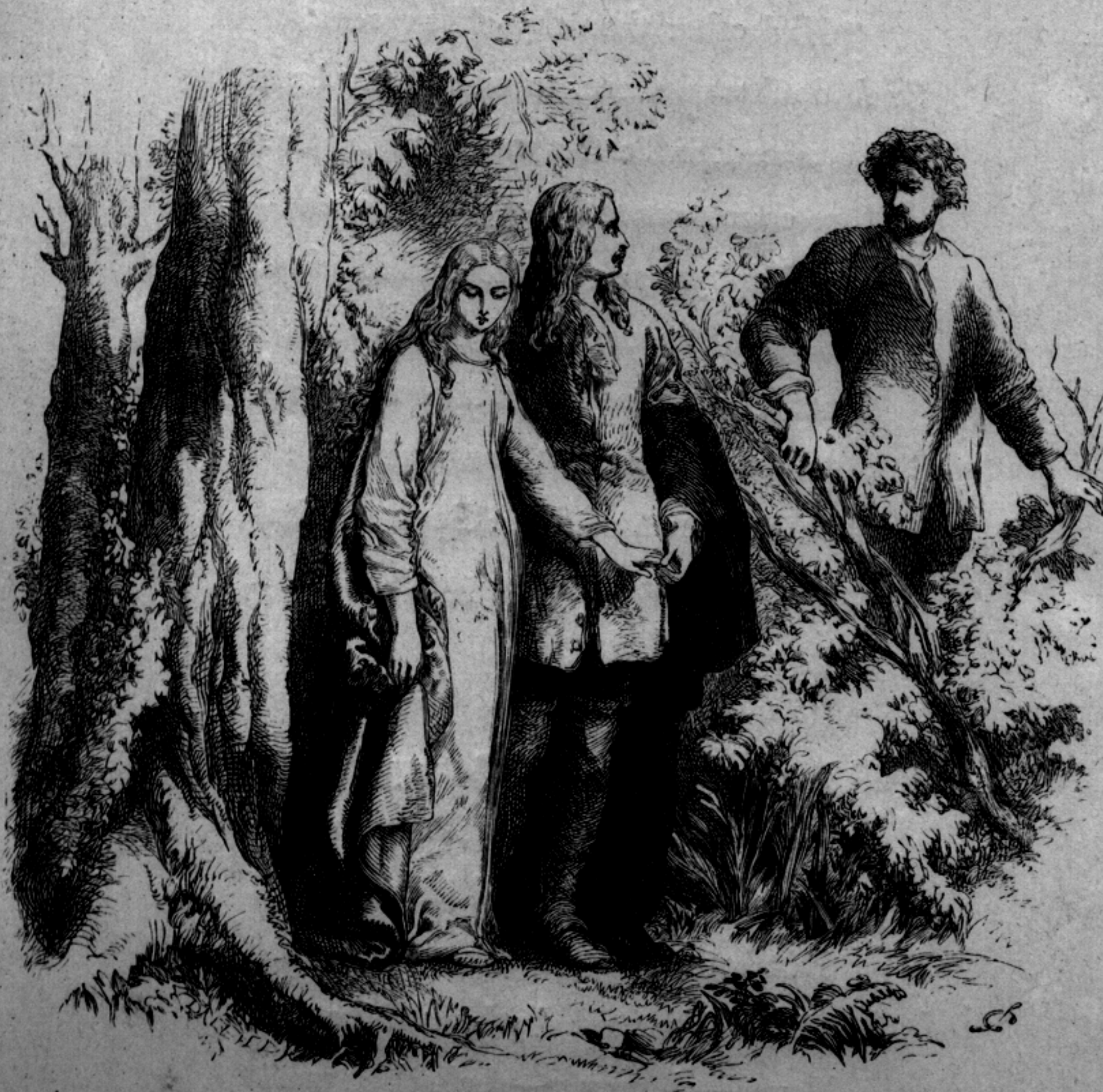
But who is this of stalwart frame,
Who paces through the forest shade ;
His looks on Gilbert turning now,
And now upon the maid ?
Her brother Porphyry ;—bending down,
Forgetful of his usual frown,
His lips upon her brow he presses,
And thus the loving pair addresses :

XIV.

“ Happy the lot of those who cannot see
Down the dark vistas of futurity ;
But happier far who never seek to know
What God in mercy veils from men below !
And, oh, most sad, most miserable lot,
To know the future though we wish it not !—
To read our fate’s enigma in the gloom,
Yet have no cunning to avert the doom !—
To see the phantoms though we shut our eyes,
And grow more wretched as we grow more wise !

XV.

Such miserable fate is mine ;
And hence, abandoned to my sorrow,
To me the present cannot shine,
To-day is darkened by To-morrow :
Fool to myself, I’ve tempted fate ;—
I’ve learned its secret and its malice ;—
I’ve seen the spots upon the sun,
And drunk the poison in the chalice.



XVI.

Dark days are lowering in the sky
For thee, O sister, whom I cherish !
I hear the tempest howl on high,
I see the flowers of passion perish !
And so I warn thee, while I may,
Of love that blossoms for a day,
Then chills and hastens to decay."

XVII.

With flushing cheek and kindling eye,
Sir Gilbert gave him prompt reply,—

“ Had other than thyself expressed
Such doubts as these, to wound my breast,
This sword, in battles worn, might teach
More courteous and befitting speech :—
Go, Porphyrr, go ; thy love shall plead
The best excuse for thy suspicion ;
But know, thine art is false and vain,
And worthless all thine erudition :
Thou canst not read the Book sublime,
Thou canst not turn the page of Time.”

XVIII.

Still Porphyrr sighed,—“ Put up thy glaive ;
I came to warn—to shield—to save !
I curse the knowledge I have bought,
But bear no anger in my thought.
If to this maid thy love be true,
Never—oh, never—shalt thou rue !
But if deceitful and forsworn,
’Twere better thou wert never born !”
And as he said he turned away,
Nor for his sister would delay,
Nor Gilbert’s angry word commanding him to stay.

XIX.

Now from his eastern couch the sun,
Erewhile in cloud and vapour hidden,
Rose in his robes of glory dight ;
And skywards, to salute his light,
Upsprang a choir, unbidden,

LOVE BETRAYED.

Of joyous larks, that, as they shook
The dew-drops from their russet pinions,
Pealed forth a hymn so glad and clear,
That Darkness might have paused to hear—
Pale sentinel on Morn's dominions—
And envied her the flood of song
Those happy minstrels poured along.

XX.

The lovers listened. Earth and Heaven
Seemed pleased alike to hear the strain;
And Gilbert, softened by the song,
Forgot his momentary pain:
“Happy,” said he, “beloved maid,
Our lives might flow 'mid scenes like this;
Still eve might bring us dreams of joy,
And morn awaken us to bliss.
I could forgive thy jealous brother;
And Mora's quiet shades might be,
Blessed with the love of one another,
A Paradise to thee and me.

XXI.

Yes, Peace and Love might build a nest
For us amid these vales serene,
And Truth should be our constant guest
Amid these pleasant wild-woods green.
My heart should never nurse again
The once fond dreams of young Ambition;
And Glory's light should lure in vain,
Lest it should lead to Love's perdition;

Another light should round me shine,
Beloved, from those eyes of thine !”

XXII.

“ Ah, Gilbert ! happy should I be
This hour to die, lest fate reveal
That life can never give a joy
Such as the joy that now I feel.
Happy ? ah, no !—I would not die,
Though sure of immortality,
And sure to watch for thee above,
There to renew more perfect love,
Without the pain and tears of this,—
Eternal, never-palling bliss !
Ah, no ! ah, no !—I cling to life :
Why should I fly the care and strife ?
Why should I seek those griefs to shun
That wait on all beneath the sun ?
Whate'er thy joy, be mine to share—
Whate'er thy grief, be mine to bear !”

XXIII.

And more she yet would say, and strives to speak ;
But warm, fast tears begin to course her cheek,
And sobs to choke her ; so, reclining still
Her head upon his breast, she weeps her fill :
And all so lovely in those joyous tears
To his impassioned eyes the maid appears,
He cannot dry them, nor one word impart
To soothe such beauteous sorrow from her heart.

XXIV.

At last she lifts her drooping head,
And, with her delicate finger, dashes
The tear away, that like a pearl
Hung on her soft eyes' silken lashes;
Then hand in hand they take their way
O'er the green meadows gemmed with dew,
And up the hill, and through the wood,
And by the streamlet bright and blue,
And sit them down upon a stone,
With mantling mosses overgrown,
That stands beside her cottage-door,
And oft repeat,
When next they meet,
That Time shall never part them more.

XXV.

He's gone! Ah, no! he lingers yet,
And all her sorrow who can tell,
As, gazing on her face, he takes
His last and passionate farewell?
"One word!" said he, "and I depart
With thy dear image in my heart:—
One more—to soothe a lover's pain,
And think of till I come again—
One kiss!"—Their red lips meet and tremble;
And she, unskilful to dissemble,
Allows, deep blushing, while he presses,
The warmest of his fond caresses.

XXVI.

He's gone!—his lessening form recedes
Adown the tapering wild-wood shade,
And sadness with redoubled weight
Falls on the spirit of the maid.

He's gone!—and to her eyes the sun grows dim;
There is no music in the sweet birds' hymn;
The air seems thick, and darkness veils the day:—
He's gone!—all's black!—the world has lost its ray!





Canto Fourth.

HOPE AND FEAR.

His words, replete with guile,
Into her heart too easy entrance won.
 In her ears the sound
Yet rung of his persuasive words, impregn'd
With reason to her seeming, and with truth.

PARADISE LOST.



HOPE AND FEAR.

I.

THE bells, in Minden's turrets dun,
Awoke a merry chime,
And banners streaming to the sun
Proclaimed a festal time ;
The song was sung, the welcome rung,
And bonfires blazed afar :
And all for young Sir Gilbert's sake,
Returned from fields of war.

II.

Five hundred merry-hearted guests
Made banquet in the hall ;

And drank a health, in bumpers deep,
Upstanding, one and all ;
With joyous shouts, repeated oft,
That shook the very wall.
“ Long life and joy to our youthful lord,
Who hath won renown by his good broad sword !
Health and long life to Minden’s heir ;
With days untroubled by grief and care,
And a bride most loving and most fair !”

III.

A burning blush upon his cheek
Upmantled as he heard ;
For memories, forgotten long,
Awakened at the word.
His old sire marked his crimsoning cheek,—
“ Nay, never blush, my son ;
Although the bride has waited long,
Both hand and heart are won :—
Fill high your goblets—to the brim ;—
Fill high with beading wine ;
And drink, ye friends of Minden’s house,
The health of Rosaline !”

IV.

Sir Gilbert’s cheek, one moment red,
The next grew marble pale ;
And, in the consciousness of guilt,
He felt his spirit fail :

HOPE AND FEAR.



He thought of Amethysta's love,
The trusting heart she bore,
The beauty of her mind and face,
The constancy he swore.

V.

But, was he born so base a churl,
That he should wed a peasant girl?
Oh, no! he was a baron bold,—
Proud of his rank, though scorning gold;
And could not, for the very shame,
Marry a maid without a name:
And yet he loved her passing well;
And it might cheer him—who could tell?—
To leave his high-born wife awhile,
And bask in Amethysta's smile;
With none the wiser for his wooing,
And a trusting heart's undoing.

VI.

“I'll drink to Rosaline,” said he;
“Of all these lands the pride;
And happy may our bridal be,
And happier the bride!”
In vain! in vain! His soul was sad;
He knew his reasoning was bad,
He knew that he was self-debased;
And though the past might be retraced,
He lacked the courage to obey,
And strove to drink remorse away.
“Well done, well done, my gallant son!”
His smiling sire replied,
“For he who weddeth her receives
Ten thousand acres yielding wine,
Ten thousand feeding sheep and beeves,

HOPE AND FEAR.

Ten thousand rich with corn and rye ;
And thou, my son, shalt make her thine,
And I will bless thee ere I die !”

VII.

Long past the midnight sat the guests,
With bacchanalian songs and jests,
Till through the oriel windows bright
The morning shone with crimson light :
And still the father blessed his son,
And thought upon his acres won ;
And still they poured the amber wine
To Gilbert and to Rosaline.

VIII.

And Amethysta, where was she ?
At her lone window, silent sitting,
Her eyes now turned upon the sky,
To watch the light clouds moonwards flitting ;
Now turned upon the vale beneath ;
Now to the forest's leafy cover ;
Now to the hill-path to her door,
To watch the coming of her lover.

IX.

“ Why stays he thus, O sister sweet ?
What can delay his tardy feet ?
Long since, were he a lover meet
For maid so tender and sincere,
The truant would have wandered here.”

HOPE AND FEAR.

X.

“I can but weep ; yet know not why,
For still the tears unbidden run :
Ah, surely joy should follow love,
As sunshine follows from the sun !
No !—Love and sorrow are akin ;—
Yet, though the casual tear may flow,
I am so happy with the love,
I will not murmur at the woe.

XI.

But 'tis not sorrow makes me weep ;
Fear it may be,—yet mixed with gladness ;
And when I sigh, my heart is full
As much of pleasure as of sadness.—
And thou, my brother ! moody still ?
And still thy heart with anguish laden ?
Hast sought in vain, o'er all the earth,
The one true-loving, human maiden ?”

XII.

“I've sought, but evermore in vain,
One kind in love and firm in duty ;
One who with purity of soul
Combines the form of youthful beauty.
I've found the loveliness I sought,
The feature and the form divine ;
But, ah ! the truth in deed and thought
Never, ah, never can be mine.”

XIII.

“Go, seek again—the world is wide ;
Why shouldst thou cease the fond endeavour ?
My heart has taught me there is one
Who, when he loves, can love for ever.
My Gilbert, since the hour when first
I led him to our cot, benighted ;
Since first I heard his gentle voice,
Since first our mutual troth was plighted,—
He has been true ; I know it well ;—
He loves me more than words can tell :
My happy soul shall never die ;
Love gives it wings to mount, to soar ;
And bloom with his for evermore.”

XIV.

Again from out her casement peeping,
When next the moon o'er Mora rose ;
With eyes of late unused to sleeping,
Fair Amethysta wept her woes.
And still she watched, and still she wept,
And gazed expecting down the glen ;
Still did she sigh, she scarce knew why,
And still she breathed her Gilbert's name,
And wondered why, most loved of men,
So tardily he came.

XV.

And when the nights were wild and dark,
And weary travellers went astray,



High from her lattice glowed a light,
That shone through storms the livelong night,
To guide her lover on his way ;
And still she breathed his name so dear,
Elate in hope or sunk in fear.

XVI.

Her brother Porphyr—where was he ?
Had he no solace to impart,

No word of sympathy or hope,
 To cheer his sister's breaking heart?
 Ah, no!—he bade her hope no more.
 Vain words they seemed, and idly spoken;
 She could not, loving as she loved,
 Believe the link was broken:
 Such hearts as theirs no fate should sever,
 And so she watched and trusted ever.

XVII.

He came not.—Still at fall of night
 She burned her solitary light,
 By love enkindled—love-attended;
 And still her brother chid her care,
 And still he warned her to beware.—
 His dreams of love were ended,—
 He could not feel how deep her woe,
 How fond her trust he could not know.

XVIII.

Time passed—and Gilbert never came:—
 “Can he be dead?” inquired the maiden;
 “Can he be dead, and I survive,
 With doubt and sorrow overladen?”
 No—he was still a living man,
 Her brother saw him yester-morn;
 And though she struggled with her grief,
 Her heart was utterly forlorn:
 And Porphyr scowled, and vowed to take
 Dire vengeance for his sister's sake.

XIX.

Thus pass away the weary weeks,
And dim her eyes and pale her cheeks;
Thus pass they heavily on, but still
Her love-light sparkles on the hill;—
True as the evening star itself
It shines upon her wall,
When due towards the darkening east
The lengthened shadows fall.

XX.

No more she gathers early flowers,
No more in morning's dewy hours
Trims with nice hand her rose-tree bowers;
No more she spreads the usual crumbs
For her blithe robin when he comes,
Wild to the world, but tame to her;
Their honest watch-dog sues in vain,
Her customary smile to gain;
In vain her fondling kittens purr;—
And the dust gathers on her lute—
Her voice is hushed—its strings are mute.

XXI.

And whither has her Gilbert fled?
Her Gilbert, from whose loving eyes
The rays of goodness seemed to spread
Like sunlight from the skies?
Her Gilbert, on whose tender tongue
The melody of passion hung?

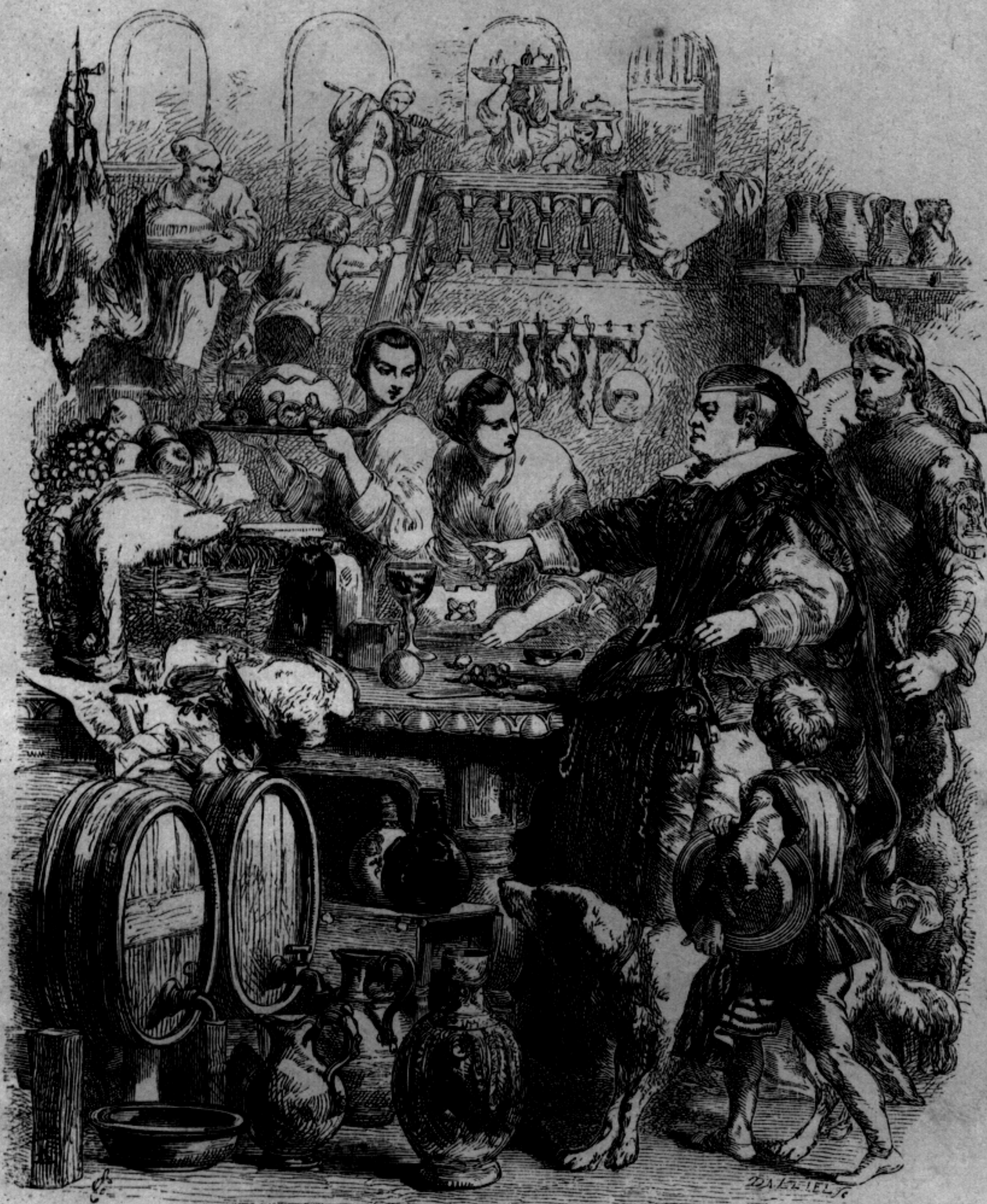


Alas! he is a busy man;
He signeth parchments all day long,
And wooeth Rosaline at night,
And joineth in her song.

XXII.

His sire, though old, is hale and stout ;
He bustles pompously about,
And thinks upon the acres wide,
And the rich dowry of the bride.





XXIII.

His mother she prepares a feast,
Great stores of venison and wine,
And foaming ale and rich conserves,
That a thousand guests may dine :

With wounded pride her heart would grieve,
Did fewer grace the bridal eve
Of Gilbert and his Rosaline.

XXIV.

His little sisters, blithe and gay,
Busk them bonnily all the day,
And long for the tardy, tardy time,
When for their bridal bells may chime,—
When they may wear
In their nut-brown hair
The white-rose wreath and jewels rare,
Like those of Rosaline the fair.

XXV.

They never heard of the loving heart
Pining in sorrow all alone ;
No one heedeth her daily smart,
No one knoweth her nightly moan.
Little, ah, little do they know
That their joy will dawn in woe
To one more beautiful than they !
Let them be joyous while they may ;
For the dark hour
Begins to lower ;
And then, ah, never, never more
Shall they be happy as before !



XXVI.

But now most merrily ring the bells,
Over the hills—the woods—the dells :
The gladsome echo falls and swells !
And with a quick rejoicing sound
It bears the happy tidings round
Of young Sir Gilbert's bridal day,
To towns and hamlets far away.

XXVII.

Behold th' applauding peasants come,
And maskers with the fife and drum ;
And troops of laughing cottage girls,
With roses gleaming through their curls,



White-robed, in many a band advance,
To tread the mazes of the dance,
And strew with early flowers the grass
Where Youth and Love and Passion pass.

XXVIII.

And, lo, they come!—The blushing bride
Leaning all fondly on his side,
And casting down her beaming face,
So full of modesty and grace,
Lest the too-prying world should see
How infinitely happy she.
Alas! the pity it would be,
If aught that mortal man could do
Should ever cause that bride to rue!

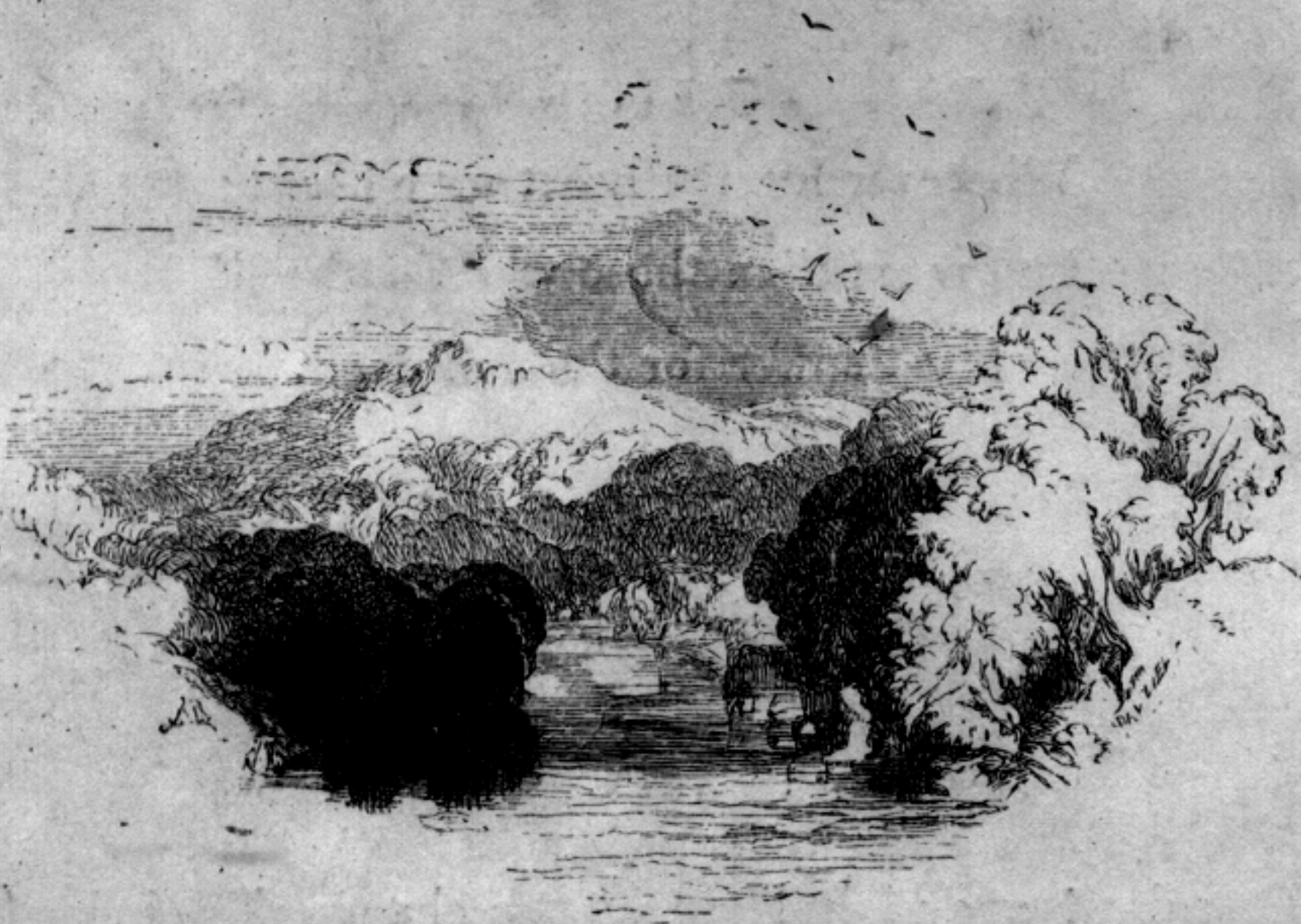


But yet the Fates must work their will,
Whatever human heart may bleed ;
And more than those who do the ill
Must suffer for the evil deed.

XXIX.

One day ! one night ! yet what a change they bring !
High in the clouds the same sweet birds may sing,
The same green leaves may rustle in the air,
And the same flowers unfold their blossoms fair,—
Still Nature smile, unchanged in all her plan,
But, oh, what change may blight the soul of man !
The sun may rise as brightly as before,
But many a heart can hail its beams no more ;

'Tis but one turn of earth's incessant ball,
Yet in that space what myriad hopes may fall !
What love depart ! what friendship melt away !
Ay, Virtue's self may wane to her decay,
Torn from her throne, heart-placed, in one eventful day !





Canto Fifth.
THE BRIDAL FEAST.

She fables not. I feel that I do fear
Her words, set off by some superior power.
 A cold shuddering dew
 Dips me all o'er.

COMUS.



THE BRIDAL FEAST.

I.

'Tis past—the mystic rites are done—
Gilbert and Rosaline are one ;
And little heed has Gilbert given
To the fond heart that he has riven.
Ay, she may pine, and moan, and weep,
And feed on thoughts that banish sleep,—
He'll come and visit her full soon,
When he has passed his honeymoon ;
And he will give her jewels rare,
And golden bands to bind her hair,

And gems that women love to wear,
And make her rich as she is fair;
And Time shall make her heart forget,
And she shall smile and love him yet.

II.

But now—he cannot think
Of another than his bride;
And beautiful is she
As she blushes by his side:
And his father, self-contented,
Wears a smile upon his face,
Blessing aye the happy day
That has dawned upon his race;
And his mother, richly vested,
Sits majestic in the hall,
Greeting every guest that enters
To the gallant festival.

III.

In old Minden's lordly mansion
Shall be revelry to-night;
From the roof-work high and fretted
Hang a hundred lustres bright,
That pervade the very casement
With a sun-surpassing light.

IV.

Pour ye out the sparkling liquor
In the goblets like a tide,

THE BRIDAL FEAST.

That a thousand guests may quaff it,
To the welfare of the bride!
Then again, fill up, high frothing,
Be the bumper full and fair,
To be drained to Gilbert's welfare,
Lady's love and Minden's heir:
May his nights be full of pleasure,
And his days devoid of care!

V.

But hark!—what voice was that?
Was't of the air or earth,
That rose so suddenly
Amid the festal mirth?
Above them and about
The echo seemed to swell;
And it said, "Oh, farewell, love!
Oh, happiness, farewell!
For never, never more
In Minden shall ye dwell!
Misery!"

VI.

The guests all thought it strange,
But nothing could they see,
And blooming cheeks grew pale
At that wild melody.
And hark! it rose again
In a plaintive strain—
"Misery!"

It came now here, now there,
Then melted into air,—
“ Misery !”

VII.

What was the matter with the fire ?
The sparks came rushing out ;
The writhing flames burned pale and blue,
And twined themselves about ;—
And now they sank, now rose again,
About the chimney tall,
Casting a light of lurid white
On the rich emblazoned wall.

VIII.

What was the matter with the lamps,
That they dangled to and fro ?
That the waning lights unsteadily rocked,
And sank in their sockets low ?
That again they burned red, blue, and green,
And a chequered radiance cast
On the fear-pale faces of the guests,
That watched them all aghast ?
Each lustre shook as it would fall,
And formed strange shadows on the wall :—
There was a witchery on them all.

IX.

And still half-uttered sounds
Amid the silence fell,

THE BRIDAL FEAST.

Saying, " Oh, farewell, love !
Oh, happiness, farewell !
For never, never more
In Minden shall ye dwell !
Misery ! misery !"

X.

And as they died away,
A gentle voice began
A more melodious song
Than ever was sung by man ;
But sad, and faint, and slow
The solemn accents rose,—
" Farewell to happiness !
Farewell the heart's repose !
For never, never more
Shall either as before
Around my pathway shine,
Or cheer this soul of mine,—
Misery !"

XI.

" Where can this solemn music be ?"
Exclaimed each wondering guest ;
While the bride concealed her pallid face
Upon the bridegroom's breast.
Bold in the battle-field was he,
When shafts of death flew near,

THE BRIDAL FEAST.

But now he trembled as he stood,
With a strange unusual fear.

XII.

It was the music of his dream,
Forgotten long ago,
That woke such pity in his soul
When slumbering in the snow.
He knew the mournful voice again,
And crowding-thoughts of sorrow and pain
Oppressed his spirit and his brain ;
And whether it were of earth or heaven,
His soul was awed, his heart was riven.

XIII.

There was a rushing sound of winds,
The doors flew open all,—
And lo ! a lady, mild and bright,
With rustling robes of silvery white,
Came gliding through the hall.

XIV.

A golden zone enclosed her waist,
She wore a ruby on her breast,
And round her brow a chaplet fair,
Made all of diamonds bright and rare,
Of which the least conspicuous gem
Was worth a monarch's diadem ;

THE BRIDAL FEAST.



And a halo followed as she went,
Serene, and sad, and innocent.

XV.

She seemed like Melancholy's self,
A living sorrow, as she passed ;

Her face was pale, her step was slow,
Her modest eyes were downwards cast :
But who she was, and whence she came,
And what her lineage or her name,
Not one of all the guests could tell ;
But Gilbert sighed, and knew her well.

XVI.

'Twas Amethysta's gentle face,
Her look serene, her form of grace ;
And much he marvelled to behold
(No cottage maiden could she be)
Her diamond crest, her zone of gold,
And her step of queenly dignity.

XVII.

There was deep silence in the hall,
You might have heard a feather fall ;
The guests were wonder-stricken all,
And stood aside to let her pass.
Calmly, slowly glided she ;
But her garments made a rustling sound,
Soft as when breezes sweep the ground
'Mid long sedge-grasses of the lea.
A thousand eyes her progress tracked,
A thousand hearts in concert beat ;—
She never raised her drooping eyes
Until she came to Gilbert's seat ;

And then she stopped—the bride meanwhile
Trembling and pale with doubts and fears—
And full upon the bridegroom turned
Her face, all wet with gushing tears,
And gazed with sad and earnest look :
The mild reproach he could not brook,
But turned away his guilty eyes,
Filled with remorseful agonies.

XVIII.

She laid her hand upon his arm,
And bowed her gentle head,
And moved her lips as if she spoke,
But not a word she said ;
Or if she did, the bride was near,
And not a whisper could she hear.
But Gilbert started at her touch,
And pressed his burning brow,
Then rose and met her mournful gaze,
Resolved to bear it now ;
For her image, though he shut his eyes,
Before his vision stole,—
And, oh, that mild reproachful glance,
It looked into his soul !

XIX.

Ere word was said, she bowed her head,
And passed like light away ;

THE BRIDAL FEAST.

And when, and how, and whither she went,
Was nobody could say:
And the holy priest who married the bride,
He knelt him down to pray,—
“ From sprites and phantoms, heavenly Lord,
Deliver us alway !”

XX.

And whither went the bridegroom forth?—
They saw him at the door,
And caught a glimpse of the lady's robe
A step or two before.
He spoke no word to his fainting bride,
No word in his mother's ear,
No farewell to his sire so old,
Or his little sisters dear;
But he followed where the lady went,
In sorrow and fear and wonderment.

XXI.

There was a lovely moon in heaven,
That tinged the green woods grey,
As far from Minden's festal halls
She glided on her way.
He could not choose but follow her;
For the high and potent spell
Of his own remorse had entered his soul,
And dared him to rebel.

XXII.

Through many a pathless wood,
O'er plains without a track,
By many a deep ravine
And yawning cavern black,
He followed the lady's steps ;
And ever where she trod
He saw a stream of lambent light
Run trickling through the sod ;
And flowers with burning leaves took root,
And sparkled underneath her foot.

XXIII.

At length they reached a forest glade,
Whose thick impenetrable shade
Was seldom cheered by beams of noon,
Or milder radiance of the moon ;
And lo ! o'er all the verdant grass
Was spread a coverlet of fire,
And gentle sounds of music came,
As if from some celestial lyre,
Most melancholy, most entrancing :
First sad and slow, but passing sweet,
Then brisk, as if they moved the feet
Of elves and fairies dancing.

XXIV.

The sturdy trunks and twisting boughs
Of the tall o'erarching trees,—

THE BRIDAL FEAST.

The pendulous foliage of the wood,
That swung to the midnight breeze,—
The grass that rustled at their feet,
And the little brook that rolled,—
All seemed to Gilbert's fear-struck eyes
To shine like molten gold ;
And pale green flames about them whirled,
And through his garments slid and curled.

XXV.

'Twas harmless fire ; but in his brain
There was a hot consuming pain.
Oft had he heard of wicked sprites,
Fashioned of flame by hellish rites,
Which took all shapes of mortal beauty,
To lure the soul from Christian duty :—
Could she be one ? Nay, Gilbert, nay ;
She never led thy faith astray,
But worshipped God with reverent knee,
And had no fault but love of thee.

XXVI.

Within this forest glade they stood,
In silence and in solitude.
She put her gentle hand on his,
And looked into his face forlorn :—
Ah, more than words of bitter wrath !
Ah, more than looks of cruel scorn !—
That look so sad, so mild, so fair,
Crushed him, and stung him to despair.

THE BRIDAL FEAST.

XXVII.

“ Listen !” said she, in mournful tone,
“ And learn my secret, ere we part ;
I’ve brought thee to the wilds alone,
That I may shew thee all my heart.

Behold a maid of heavenly birth,
Formed of the eternal fires that shine
To light and warm this world of thine ;
Not as thyself, of grovelling earth,
But of an essence more divine.

XXVIII.

Greater than thou, O son of clay !
A thousand years shall pass away,
And never witness our decay :
But yet—ah, less than thou !

Immeasurably less !—
Our mortal souls must fade at last
Into eternal nothingness !
For this through many a year
We shed the bitter tear ;
And for this great, unutterable woe,
Our tears shall never cease to flow.

XXIX.

And yet, O mortal man !
Whose days are as a span,
Not hopeless all are we :

THE BRIDAL FEAST.

Love can bestow
A solace for our woe,
And give us Immortality.

XXX.

If from a human heart we win
A love devoid of guile and sin,
A love for ever kind and pure,
A love to suffer and endure,—
Unalterably firm and great
Amid the angry storms of fate,—
For ever young, for ever new,
For ever passionate and true;—
This gained, all woe is past, all joy begun—
Heaven is our hope—Eternity is won!

XXXI.

The doom of death that we deplore
Lies on our suffering souls no more;
We share the threescore years and ten,
And the eternal heaven of men.
I thought thy love the ray divine
That was to guide me from despair;
And how I trusted—how I loved—
O Gilbert! let thine heart declare.

XXXII.

For thee I would have borne
All poverty, all scorn,—

THE BRIDAL FEAST.

Hunger and thirst and cold,
All misery untold,
With steadfast mind ;
Disease and care and pain,
And all the woes that reign
O'er human kind ;—
Most happy of all ills to bear my part,
Blessed with the kindness of one constant heart,
And the dear hope, enhancer of my love,
Of immortality with thee above !

XXXIII.

I placed my soul upon this little chance,
And it has failed ; and never, never more
Shall hope and gladness cheer me as of yore.
I wake to misery from a blissful trance :
The trial has been made,
The answer has been given,
And I have lost my joy—
My hope—my love—my heaven !

XXXIV.

Thou hast been false, and all is lost !
I have become again
A worthless atom, weather-tossed
Upon the world's wide plain ;
Living my little hour
In sunshine or in shower,

THE BRIDAL FEAST.

Then dying in the sorrow,
That on my night of death
There shall arise no morrow :
No solace ! no relief !
No love to cheer my grief !
Misery ! misery !”

XXXV.

A thousand voices seemed to swell
Upon the midnight air,
And join the maiden in the cry
Of her intense despair :
Above them and around arose the mournful sound—
“ Misery ! misery !”

XXXVI.

Sir Gilbert knelt upon the grass,
And struggled hard to speak ;
He clasped his hands and bowed his head,
And tears bedewed his cheek.
“ Forgive my crime to love and thee,
O daughter of the sun !
Pity, oh, pity and forgive
The wrong that I have done !”

XXXVII.

“ Alas ! immortal man,
Small is the boon to crave ;
I pity and forgive,
But have no power to save !

THE BRIDAL FEAST.



Ten thousand angry sprites
Are hovering in the air,
Their fiery hands upraised
To strike, and not to spare!"

XXXVIII.

Sadly Sir Gilbert raised his eyes,
And saw them brightening all the skies :
They came—a swift and flaming cloud—
He heard their voices fierce and loud ;
And all the phantoms seemed to say,
“ His life is forfeit—let him pay.”

XXXIX.

One, proud and tall above the rest,
Pointed a weapon at his breast—
A burning sword with blade of flame—
He shrank, and uttered Porphyr's name.
’Twas he—the Spirit of the Fire !
Majestic in his scorn and ire ;
His fierce red eyeballs flashing light,
His vengeful arm upraised to smite.

XL.

But suddenly a mournful voice
Arose upon the midnight air ;
’Twas not the man's,—for he was nerved
His punishment to bear,—
But Amethysta's : she had grasped
The hasty weapon, prompt to kill,
Then sank in tears upon the earth
To plead for him, beloved still.
Great as his crime, she knew too well
His death would double all her woe,—

“ Spare him, O brother, spare !” she cried,
“ And for my sake avert the blow.

XLI.

And if a victim there must be,
Oh, let the vengeance fall on me !
I can endure it for his sake,
Nor murmur, though my heart should break :
Or if his punishment thou’st sworn,
Let it be such as may be borne.
Oh, let him live the allotted span
That heaven has meted out to man,
And I will weep, and watch, and pray,
Unseen, but near him night and day,
To guide and shelter him alway !”

XLII.

She spake—she wept : the burning brand
Fell slowly from her brother’s hand :
“ The man shall live !” he cried in scorn,
“ Not yet shall he expire ;
But better had he ne’er been born
Than seen this day, and proved forsworn
To a daughter of the Fire !

XLIII.

Upon his head I place a sign
That shall for ever burn and shine,

THE BRIDAL FEAST.

So that the spirits of Earth and Air
May take no pity on his despair;
So that the spirits of Water and Flame
May know his guilt and curse his name;
So that all men their doors may close,
And shun him wheresoe'er he goes;
So that all women, when they see him,
May shut their eyes, and shuddering, flee him!

.XLIV.

Winter and summer, day and night,
Shall burn a pallid phantom light,
A beacon evermore above him,
To scare the eyes of those who love him;—
His flesh shall wither, his bones decay,
And grow decrepit in a day:
He hath wronged a daughter of the Fire—
This be his doom till he expire!"

XLV.

He put his hand on Gilbert's brow,—
Oh, what a pain consumed him now!
About the distance of a span
A light descended, blue and wan,
And fixed itself above his head,
And all the fiery phantoms fled;
And Amethysta—she was gone!
Upon the grass he lay alone,
Making a sad and bitter moan.

XLVI.

A pang through all his frame he felt,
As if his very bones would melt;
His auburn hair turned silvery grey,
His firm flesh shrivelled and shrank away;
His youthful strength began to droop,
His limbs to fail, his back to stoop:
Oh, it was fearful to behold
How a minute had made the young man old.

XLVII.

He rose,—but whither should he go?
Where should he hide his pain and woe?
Cold horrors trembled through his frame,
And the livid, searching, phantom flame
Filled his brain with hideous light:
He shut his eyes to shun the sight;
But still he saw it, and felt his head
Shine like a ball of molten lead;
It cast a glare upon the ground;
While a thousand voices rang around,—
“He hath wronged a daughter of the Fire,
This be his doom till he expire!”

XLVIII.

Yet he thought he heard, as he swooned away,
A voice like Amethysta's say,—
“For thee, through many a year,
I'll shed the bitter tear;

THE BRIDAL FEAST.

Wherever thou mayst go,
I'll see and share thy woe,
And 'mid all pain and ill
Pray for and watch thee still."
And the words, as slumber o'er him stole,
Were heavenly music to his soul.





Canto Sixth.
THE DOOM.

Cover him, ye pines !
Ye cedars, with innumerable boughs,
Hide him !

PARADISE LOST.

There is no future pang
Can deal that justice on the self-condemned
He deals on his own soul.

MANFRED.



THE DOOM.

I.

THE bridal guests went sadly forth ;
The men all wondered sore,
And the women vowed that thing like this
Was never known before :
Some said the lady was a witch,
With her golden zone and diamonds rich ;
Some thought she was a living maid,
Whom false Sir Gilbert had betrayed ;
Some said she was an evil sprite,
That her very robes were ghastly white ;—

THE DOOM.

But all agreed,
In very deed,
That 'twas a mournful day,
And that the glory of the house
Had for ever passed away.

II.

The Lord of Minden pined like one
Beneath an evil ban,
And wandered through his lonely halls
A melancholy man.
The mother in her chamber sat,
And made incessant moan
For the son she loved, so strangely lost,
So beautiful—her own.

III.

The bride upon her lonely bed
Lay sighing all the night,
And wondered who the lady was,
So sorrowful and bright,
That stole her husband from her heart
Upon her bridal eve;
And whether she were a lady fair,
Or phantom to deceive,
Born of the vapours of the air,
Flitting for ever here and there:—
Ah, no! she thought it could not be,—
A very woman, alas, was she!

THE DOOM.

And she wept her fate,—a wife betrayed,
And a wronged and most unhappy maid.

IV.

There came a pilgrim to the gate,
With locks of scanty grey ;
His face was pale, his back was bent,
And he tottered ever as he went
Upon his weary way.
The mother in her garden walked,
To breathe the morning air,
And think upon her absent son,
So gallant and so fair,
And cherish every shadowy hope
That glimmered through despair.

V.

The pilgrim seized her by the hand,
And fell upon his knee :
“ I am thy son—thy very son !”
With trembling voice, said he.
“ Give me thy pity, mother dear !
With look maternal see ;
And let thy heart accept the son
Accursed, but loving thee !”

VI.

“ Alas, poor soul !” the lady cried,
“ May God thy wits restore !
But come not here to wring my heart

THE DOOM.

With mockery so sore."
And then she looked upon his face,
And started back with fear,
For a light above the old man's head,
Was burning blue and clear ;
And a ghastly glow
It cast below—
And oh ! her blood ran chill,
As with his bright, wild, haggard eyes
He gazed upon her still.

VII.

She could not brook the piercing look
Of that man so pale and old,—
She shrank affrighted from the touch
Of his clammy hands so cold ;
And, sore afraid, she called for aid
As to her robes he clung,
For madness glittered in his eye,
Though love was on his tongue.

VIII.

Alarmed to hear that cry of fear,
The Lord of Minden came,
But stopped and shuddered as he saw
That blue and ghastly flame.
The stranger grasped him by the hand,
Still bending on his knee,—
“ I am thy son—thy very son !
Look down and pity me.”

THE DOOM.



His sire repelled the loathsome touch,
And breathed an inward prayer,—
“ Save us, O Lord, from wicked men,
And phantoms of the air !”

IX.

In mourning robes the sorrowing bride
 Came forth, forlornest maid ;
 The stranger looked into her face,
 And clung to her for aid :
 " I am thy husband, Rosaline !
 Deep is my agony,
 And I bear a curse—a heavy curse,
 And all for love of thee !"
 But Rosaline, with shrieks of dread,
 Covered her pallid face and fled.

X.

'Twas Gilbert—miserable man !
 Soul-stricken and heart-sore ;
 Scorned by the sire who loved him once,
 And the mother kind that bore ;
 An odious and a fearful thing
 To the bride that should adore !
 By all rejected and denied,
 He wrung his withered hands and sighed ;
 And maddened by excess of woe,
 He fled—ah ! whither could he go ?

XI.

He knew not :—'twas a great despair
 By which his heart was riven ;
 And, passive as the autumn leaf
 Before the tempest driven,
 The storm of passion bore him on,

Weak-limbed although he were.
“ Hide me,” he cried, “ ye woods and caves,
From the harsh insulting glare
Of the fierce, proud-hearted, bitter sun,
That burns and mocks me as I run !”

XII.

Men hooted at him as he passed,
The children left their play,
While lonely women barred their doors,
And dogs flew out to bay ;
But heedless both of beast and man,
Through field, through copse, through brake he ran,
To gain the shade of darkest woods,
And hide in gloomiest solitudes.

XIII.

And thus he wandered wearily forth,
Till passed the sunny noon,—
Till shone the star of dewy eve,
And rose the yellow moon :
He took no heed of passing day,
None of the night so fair ;
Nor time nor space was aught to him,
So sunken in despair.
’Twas past the midnight ere he stopped,
And then upon the sward he dropped,
Exhausted by his toil and pain,—
Sleep was the balsam of his brain.

XIV.

The morning sun was fiery hot
When from the ground he sprang;
The squirrel gambolled in the trees,
And the merry chaffinch sang;
And he was wan, and worn, and pale:
Their joy distressed him sore,—
He thought it shame the birds should sing
While such a curse he bore,
With madness gnawing in his brain,
And hunger at his core.

XV.

True!—hunger-pains were hard to bear:
Should he deplore his lot?
The worst was death, and that were joy,
And so it mattered not;
And 'mid the rustling leaves he lay,
And bravely fasted all the day.

XVI.

But thirst was more than hunger keen;
And as the noon drew near,
He would have given
His hope of heaven
For a draught of water clear.
He rose with dry and hollow eye,
And groped the woods among,
In search of the delicious drops
To cool his parching tongue;

And as he went he plucked and ate
The berries as they hung ;
And in despite of all his pain,
He loved his wretched life again.

XVII.

He thought he heard amid the trees
A sound as of a brook,
A gentle murmur far away,
In some sequestered nook.
He gathered up his waning strength,
And on towards it stepped ;
And when with walking wearied quite,
He laid him down and crept,
And moistened his desireful lips
With droplets of the dew,
In foxglove-bells or on the fern,
That in the shadow grew ;
And still the light above him burned,
Wherever he went, wherever he turned.

XVIII.

Gently through violet-bordered banks
The murmuring waters came ;
He saw them glancing in the light,
And blessed their Maker's name.
But alas the day ! his strength gave way
Before he reached the brink :
He saw the wild birds hop and play,
And stoop to bathe and drink ;—

XIX.

But he—he could not move a limb
To bring him closer to the brim;
His feverish hands he could not dip
To bear the moisture to his lip;
And he cursed himself, he cursed the stream,
And the birds that wantoned in the beam,
Then cast his humbled eyes to heaven,
And prayed to God to be forgiven.

XX.

And thus until the night came on
Upon the bank he lay,
Until, most miserable man,
He lost the strength to pray:
But still he watched the stream run by,
Resigned to suffer—and to die.

XXI.

'Twas dark, without a moon or star,
And, in a fitful mood,
The wind all night made restless moan
In the green leaves of the wood;
And heavy clouds athwart the sky
Were drifted by the blast,
And—joy! oh, more than mortal joy!—
The rain came down at last.
It dripped upon him from a bough,—
Upon his eyes, upon his brow,

THE DOOM.

Upon his lips, upon his cheek,—
It gave him strength to move and speak;
And his first accents flowed in prayer
To be delivered from despair.

XXII.

He cooled his limbs upon the grass,
First pleasure of his pain,
And then he crawled toward the brook
And drank the blessed rain,
And owned each drop was balm to save
His fainting body from the grave.

XXIII.

And thus refreshed, he sat him down
Beneath a beechen tree,
To watch the shadows of the moon
Sadly and silently;
And visions bright before him came
Of the maiden of the flame:
He thought of Amethysta mild,
So good, so fair, by him beguiled;
And bowed his forehead to the dust,
And owned his punishment was just.

XXIV.

Even at the last her look was kind,
Her voice still echoed in his mind;
Oh, that her face he could but see,
And sue for pardon on his knee!

The world despised, the world denied—
 Father and mother, friend and bride—
 But she, through all his grief and ill,
 Pitied and wept, and loved him still.

XXV.

Lost to the world in dreams like these,
 Of mingled love and woe,
 He did not mark, in the silence dark,
 A footfall sounding low,—
 A stealthy tread among the leaves,
 That scared the sleepless owl;
 But when there burst upon his ear
 The wild wolf's sullen howl,
 He started up, for he knew the sound,
 And sought for shelter all around,
 And saw amid the brushwood brown
 The wandering pack come scouring down.

XXVI.

The distant echoes of the wood
 Resounded with their cries,
 He saw the wild ferocious glare
 Of their bright and burning eyes:
 There were a score of them hunger-spiced,
 Rushing like Ghouls on a corse new dead;
 And he struggled hard, with drooping strength,
 To climb an oaken bough,
 While big, cold drops of agony
 Came starting to his brow.

XXVII.

But his strength was gone as the pack came on :
 What should he do, O kindly Heaven ?
 Down should he lie, and tamely die,
 And let his yielding limbs be riven,
 Flesh and sinew, bone from bone ?
 Horror, most horrid, even to think !
 And again he strove to climb the bough
 That hung o'er the streamlet's brink ;
 But his feet failed him as he trod,
 And he fell upon the slippery sod :—
 Their teeth were in his quivering thigh,
 The misery of death was nigh.

XXVIII.

He struggled with his nerveless hands,
 And called to Heaven for aid,
 And his shrieks above the howl of wolves
 Re-echoed through the shade.
 And aid was near : a beldame old
 From out the thicket ran,
 With shrieks of terror loud as those
 Of the miserable man.

XXIX.

In each lank, shrivelled, claw-like hand
 She bore aloft a flaming brand :
 In her eyes, fire—in her track, light,
 She rushed upon their dazzled sight,

And waved her torches to and fro,
With shout and yell, with thrust and blow,
Until the fiercest of the pack
Shrank howling, terror-smitten, back :
Great was their famine, but they fled,
And cowered in darkest nooks for dread.

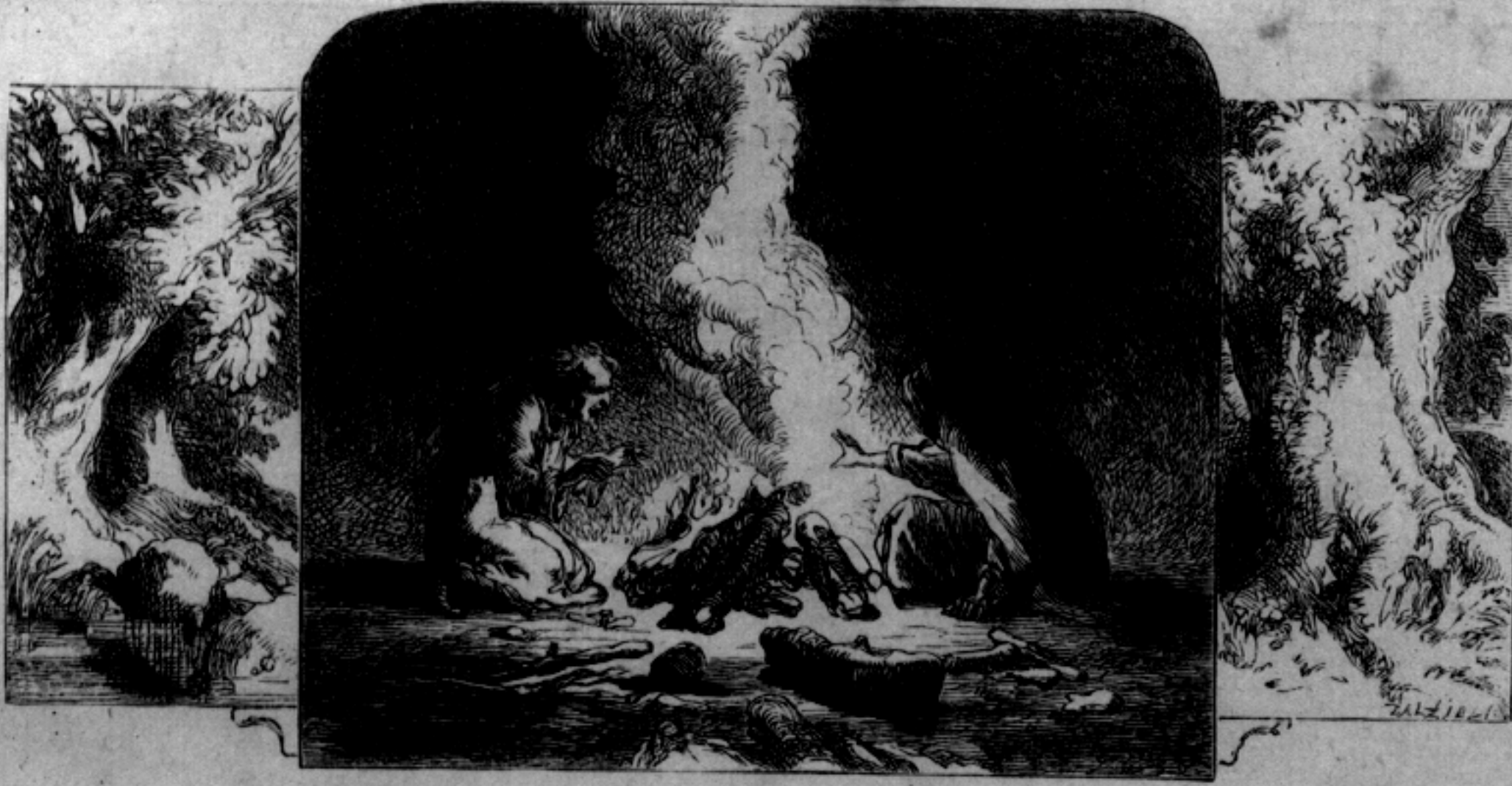




Canto Seventh.

THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE.

Love is indestructible ;
Its holy flame for ever burneth :
From heaven it came, to heaven returneth.
SOUTHEY.



THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE.

I.

OLD was the woman,—ah, wretched old !
Cold was her touch,—ah, clammy and cold !
Her face was withered and sere and white,
But her eyes were wells of living light :
Time, that had shrunk each rounded limb,
Had failed those lustrous orbs to dim ;
And she was strong and quick of tread,
Though the snows of age were on her head ;
And through the woods, intent to save,
She bore him fainting to her cave.

II.

It was a dark and lonely spot,
The kindly sunshine cheered it not
With morn or evening ray ;
And in the midst a feeble fire
Burned ever night and day—
A fire of sticks, which the withered hag
Went gathering alway—
For noons of summer failed to warm
Her frozen veins and shivering form.

III.

She bore him to this lonely place,
And on the floor she spread
Clean straw to rest his weary limbs,
And rushes for his head ;
And from the spring that murmured near
She brought him draughts of water clear,
And bathed his temples o'er and o'er,
His fainting spirit to restore.

IV.

Beside the hearth Sir Gilbert sat
For many an hour awake,
And still she warmed her clay-cold hands,
But not a word she spake :
And he was grateful for her care,
And thanked her oft and spoke her fair ;
But she nor lifted head nor eye,
Nor breathed one accent in reply.

V.

Wearied at last he dropped asleep ;
And o'er his slumbers came
Visions most wild, of a maiden mild
Singing amid the flame ;
And of the woman gaunt and old,
The hag without a name ;
And of howling wolves and phantoms dire,
Chasing each other through the fire.

VI.

Anon he had a sadder dream :
Under a tree beside a stream
He found his Amethysta, pale,
And heard her mournfully bewail
All her love-illusions lost,
All her fond hopes foully crossed ;
And he breathed her name in whispers deep,
And blessed her in his happier sleep.

VII.

Awakened, still that name so dear
Slid faintly from his tongue ;
And the witch-like woman, pale and old,
Above him, drooping, hung.
There was a smile upon her face,
So tender and so full of grace,
That Gilbert marvelled much to see
How fair a furrowed cheek could be.

Sweet loving-kindness ! if thou shine,
The plainest face may seem divine,
And beauty's self grow doubly bright
In the mild glory of thy light.

VIII.

She spoke, and every word she said
Was comfort to his mind :
“ Rise from the earth, O suffering man,
And know that God is kind !
If thou art smitten for thy sin,
Repentance may thy pardon win.
Happy would Amethysta be
To hear thy dreaming voice ;
Could she believe that thou wert true,
Her spirit would rejoice,
For all her lingering trust, I know,
Her love, her pity, and her woe.”

IX.

The tears ran down Sir Gilbert's cheek,
And joy with sorrow grew :
“ Whoe'er thou art that know'st my crime,
Know my repentance too :
But Amethysta, maid divine !
Lost by my guilt, can ne'er be mine ;
I am unworthy of her care,
Too vile and sunken in despair,
For love of one so good and fair.

X.

Speak of her still!—relenting Fate
Has kindly brought me here :
'Twill be a joy 'mid all my pain
To breathe her name so dear.
Speak of her ever—night and morn—
The curse I suffer must be borne ;
But it will ease its heavy load,
To think of her and trust in God ;
And I will share thy gloomy cave,
And be thy servant and thy slave.”

XI.

“ Alas ! ” said she, “ my voice is weak,
And I am frail and old,
And all the day and every night
I perish with the cold.
Behold the embers on the floor,
They faint and flicker evermore ;
But go thou forth, thine axe in hand,
And roam through all the forest land,
And hew me logs of oak and pine,
Until thy strength shall tire,—
Logs thick and strong and branches long,
To feed this wasting fire ;
We'll sit together in the glow,
And I will tell thee all I know
Of Amethysta's love and woe.”

XII.

He took the axe and wandered forth
Amid the woodland shades,
And gathered branches as he went,
Wind-scattered in the glades ;
And still his courage and his strength
With each exertion grew,
Until the boughs of oak and pine
In shooting splinters flew.
And thus he wrought without complaint
From morn until the noon ;
He bound his loads with willow twigs,
By the twilight of the moon,
And bore them on his weary back
Through wilds unfurrowed by a track.

XIII.

She rubbed her withered hands for joy
To greet him as he came,
And branch on branch, and log on log,
He cast into the flame,
Till merrily the fire shot up,
And poured the sparks like hail,
Casting a glow of ruddy light
On their faces thin and pale ;
And by the hearth she took her seat,
And beckoned Gilbert to her feet.

XIV.

She told him of the dream he had
By the watch-fire in the snow,



And of the chaunt the maiden sang
So musical and low,
And of the pity in his soul
Awakened by her woe ;
And much he wondered as he heard,
And hung entranced on every word.

XV.

She told how "spirits walked the world"
More beautiful than man,

Who sailed unseen upon the winds,
 Or on the waters ran ;—
 Dwellers amid the airy spheres,
 Or denizens of flame,
 All creatures of the self-same God,
 And worshipping His name ;
 Brighter than man, more pure, more free—
 But, ah ! not half so blest as he.

XVI.

She told of Amethysta's love,
 How fond she was and true,
 And opened his remorseful heart,
 And bared it to his view ;
 And shewed how pitiless he was,
 How perjured and how vile,
 To woo this trusting maiden's love,
 And win it to beguile,
 And rob her (cruel, though forgiven,)
 Of joy on earth, of hope in heaven !

XVII.

Yes, wisdom dwelt upon her tongue,
 And eloquent was she,
 And he listened with an earnest mind,
 And heart of agony,
 And never tired ; for dear to him
 Was Amethysta's name,—
 Dear the remembrance of her love,
 Sweet maiden of the flame !

And dearest far a blessed hope—
It made his soul with sorrow cope—
That he should see her 'mid his pain,
And press her to his heart again.

XVIII.

And thus within that lonely cave
The live-long days he passed,—
Many a week and many a month,
Till the winter came at last;
And every morning forth he went
Until the noon of day,
With toil and moil and blistering feet,
Through all that forest grey,
And hewed the logs of pine and oak,
Upon her fire to lay,—
For she, alas! could never speak
When the flames burned low and weak;
She loved a fire-light fierce and strong,
And thickest boughs a fathom long;
And though the load his strength might break,
'Twas borne for Amethysta's sake.

XIX.

Hard was his fare,—his only food
The roots and berries of the wood,
His drink the water pure;
But if the mind be strong in love,
The body can endure.

His arm was weak, his step was faint,
 His toil and labour hard,
 But he breathed no murmur of complaint,
 But thought of his reward ;—
 The pity of that woman wild,
 Whose tongue might never tire
 To talk of Amethysta mild,
 By the glowing of her fire.

XX.

Well could she speak : her converse high
 Was of the secrets of the world,
 And of the God who made the spheres,
 Whose hand the wandering comets hurled,—
 Whose ceaseless love pervaded space,
 And peopled every rolling star
 With creatures wonderful as man,
 Or pure as ministering angels are,—
 Whose wisdom governed all below,
 And made us better through our woe.

XXI.

It seemed as if an angel spake :
 And while her gentle accents rung,
 He quite forgot her form and face
 So wrinkled, old, and scant of grace,
 Charmed by the beauty of her tongue ;
 And much he learned : affliction taught
 The knowledge joy had never brought ;

And every hour he lingered here
Gave him the wisdom of a year.

XXII.

The winter passed, the summer came,
And clothed the fields and woods,
The fruits grew ripe, the leaves decayed,
And winter poured its floods;
And still within that gloomy cave
He dwelt, a lonely man,
Enduring meekly, night and day,
His melancholy ban :
Though smitten, firm ; though bleeding, unsubdued ;
Fate had not crushed him in her wildest mood.
Love was his solace 'mid his deepest ill,
Patience his bosom-friend, and Hope his beacon still.

XXIII.

There came a chilly winter day,
The fire was burning black,
He piled up logs and branches dry,
To make the blazes crack,
Ere the woman old, o'er the waste of snows,
Came worn and weary back ;
But fainter still the more he piled
It burned upon the floor ;
He blew it with his feeble breath,
And fanned it o'er and o'er ;
But vain his toil—the last dim spark
Flickered and died—and all was dark.

XXIV.

And he was grieved :—the wintry winds
Blew miserably cold ;
Sad would she be at her return
Over the frozen wold.

Where could she be that bitter day ?
Among the snow-drifts far away
She might have sunk in pitfalls deep,
Or lain on treacherous snows to sleep.

XXV.

The doubt was pain ; for good was she,
And kind in all his misery ;
And, next to memory of her
Who blessed him with her latest breath,
Her sympathy relieved his woe,
Her pity kept his heart from death.

XXVI.

So forth he went, and all day long
He sought her o'er the trackless snow ;
With call and shout, he roamed about
O'er woodland high, o'er valley low,
O'er fell and brake, by frozen lake,
And brooks that cold forbade to flow.

XXVII.

But vain the search : nor far nor near
A human foot-print could he see,

The drifting snows enwrapped the earth,
Untrodden in their purity,
Save by himself, and here and there
The light feet of some timid hare
Scared by his shouts, that glided by,
Noiseless and swift, to shelter nigh.

XXVIII.

And thus all day amid the woods,
Through perilous glens he stole ;
He sought her in the deepest shades,
He sought her in the wildest glades,
With agony of soul ;
But all in vain,—and evening chill
Found him alone and wandering still.

XXIX.

And yet—she might have reached the cave—
The hope impelled him to return ;
But all within was cold and void—
The feeble fire had ceased to burn.
Again he went with cry and shout,
And roamed the woodlands all about,
And sought her till the lingering day
Shone through the mists upon his way.

XXX.

And far he wandered in the night ;
For when the morning rose,

Before him lay his father's halls,
Their turrets white with snows ;
Before him lay the village church,
Calm in the morning shine,
Where slept, escutcheoned and entombed,
The fathers of his line :
There were the font, the shrine, the tomb,
For the three ages of their doom ;
And he gazed upon the holy place,
And brushed the tear-drops from his face.

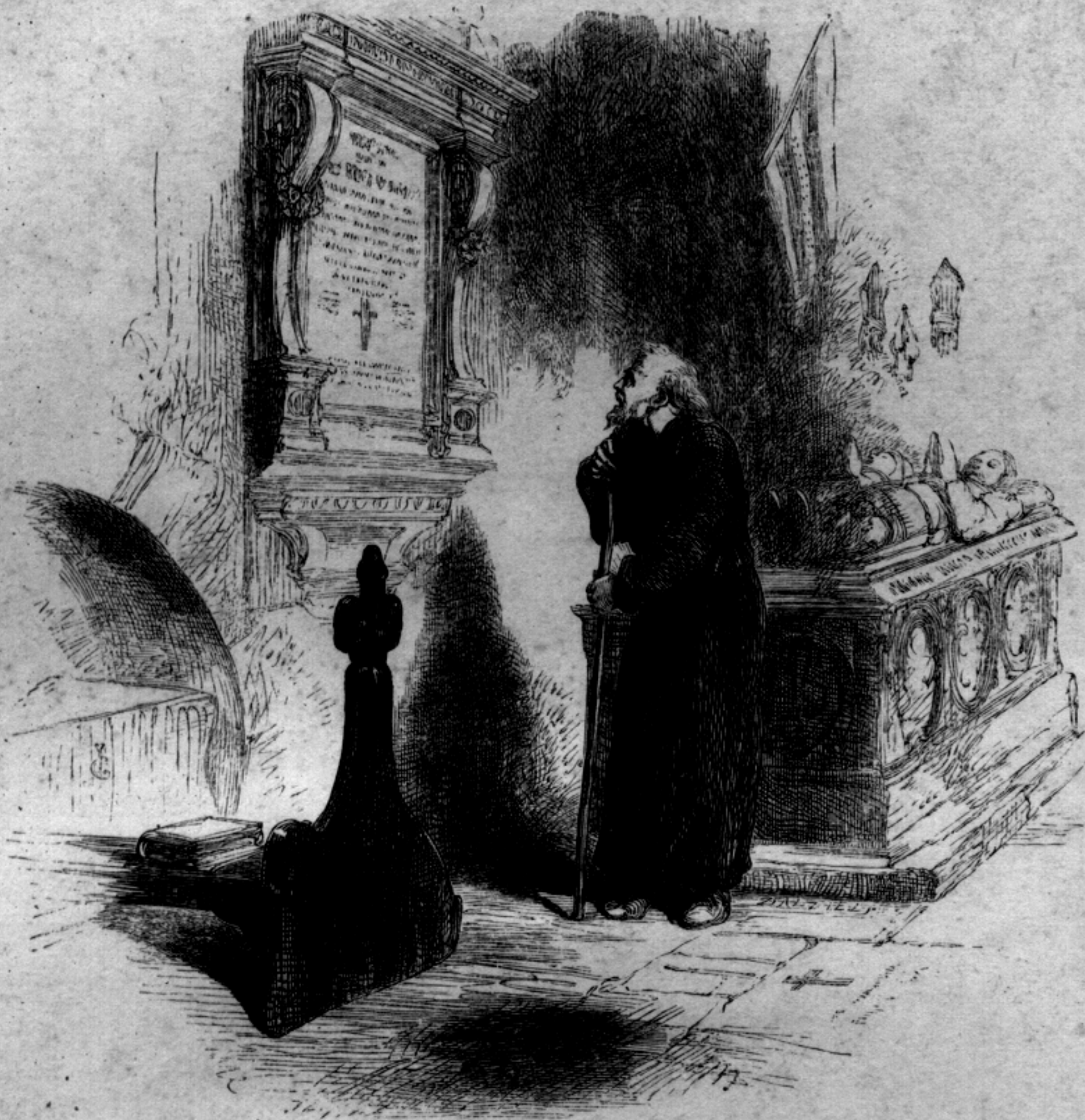
XXXI.

'Twas there forsworn he gave his hand
To Rosaline, with gold and land,
And broke the heart—oh, shame to tell !—
Of a maid who loved him well.
Sad were the memories of the place ;
And as he gazed around,
He thought the spirits of his sires
Came up from every mound,
To claim him of their company,
And drag him under ground.

XXXII.

He read the epitaphs inscribed
On each funereal stone,
So flattering all, that surely death
Had claimed the good alone ;
And he started with a sudden awe
To stand before his own.

THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE.



- His father had bewailed him dead,
His mother many a tear had shed,
And raised a stone, that men might see
How they revered his memory.

XXXIII.

It was a marble large and white,
And he read it by the misty light:

It said that virtue's paths he trod,
And loved his country and his God ;
That he was mild, sincere, and good,
With grace and courtesy imbued ;
Of gallant heart, of steadfast mind—
A tender son, a husband kind,—
Who never broke the word he gave—
In friendship staunch, in danger brave ;—
And he sighed and blushed, ashamed to own
The flattering falsehood of the stone.

XXXIV.

He lingered yet : the village-bells
Sent forth a joyous chime,
Such as they rung when he was young,
In the merry Christmas time,—
Such as they pealed when he was wed
To the virgin bride who mourned him dead ;
'Twas the last time he heard them toll,
And they raised sad memories in his soul.

XXXV.

He lingered still to hear them ring,
They bore him back to life's first spring ;
Perchance they pealed—he could not tell—
Bridal chimes for Amadel,
Sister loved and cherished well.
Loud they rang, and he stepped aside
To see the bridal and the bride.



XXXVI.

Behind a broad and aged yew
His thin and wasted form he drew,
And there, unseen by mortal eyes,
He watched until the noon,
While still the bells kept ringing a rhyme,
Pealing a joyous tune,
Bearing o'er hills and dells away
The tidings of a marriage-day.

XXXVII.

He watched: the gay procession came,—
He could not tell the bridegroom's name;
But the blushing bride—he knew her well—
'Twas not his sister Amadel.

THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE.

Pale and paler grew his cheek,
As he gazed on Rosaline ;
He knew her by her stately tread
And her ripe lips, red as wine ;
By her rich and raven hair,
Streaming o'er her shoulders fair ;
By her beauty and her pride,
Well he knew her—once his bride !

XXXVIII.

Should he mar her joy ? not he :
Happy, happy might she be !
On her bliss he would not break—
Hand or heart he would not take :
Dead to earth, and dead to her,
Laden with a heavy lot,
All the prayer that he could breathe
Was a prayer to be forgot.
He heard the pealing organ swell,
And peace upon his spirit fell ;
The rite was said—exchanged the vow—
His soul was Amethysta's now.

XXXIX.

And where was she—the woman old,
Whose sympathy was wealth untold ?
Alas ! he had forgotten quite :
Dull and thankless man was he,
To linger there in dreaming lost,
Forgetful of her misery ;

Dying perchance in pitfalls drear,
None to aid her far or near.

XL.

The thought was like a mortal pain,
And he wandered to the woods again.
No more he trod the spotless snow
With tardy footsteps faint and slow :
Once more—O bliss ! he was a boy—
A sudden youth, a sudden joy
Shot through his heart and nerved his limbs :
He felt his youth in every pore,
Light, hopeful, vigorous, and free,
As in the happy days of yore.

XLI.

The wind that stirred the forest boughs
Blew freshly in his hair,
No longer scant and hoary grey,
But auburn clustering fair,
Such as in youthful prime it grew,
And his pulse beat high with courage new.
For him some loving saint had striven,
No more the light above him shone,
His curse removed, his sin forgiven—
Now he would live to Love alone.

XLII.

And still with shout and cry he went
Among the woodlands wild,

THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE.

To seek the woman of the cave,
Whose pity snatched him from the grave,—
Whose converse had beguiled
The weary days, the nights of woe,
When he was cursd by all below.

XLIII.

There were sweet voices in the sky,
Now near and now remote,
High in the undulating air
A song appeared to float—
The mournful soul of Music dwelt
In each entrancing note.
He listened to the heavenly sounds,
And thought that he could hear
His long-lost Amethysta's name—
That name for ever dear—
Mingling with his, weird harps on high
Teeming the while with harmony.

XLIV.

The clear full moon shone brightly down
O'er wide extending snows,
And ever as he wandered on,
The melting music rose.
'Twas midnight ere he reached the cave,
And feebly he could mark,
With hope and joy, a light within,
Pale peering through the dark.

THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE.

XLV.

He gathered leaves and branches dry,
And piled them on the floor,
And gently fed the waning fire,
Till flames began to roar;
And then he carried logs of oak
And sturdy boughs of pine,
Until the darkness of the cave
Grew bright as summer shine.

XLVI.

And as he piled, there was a sound
Of heavenly music all around;
And light pervaded all the place—
It shone upon the woman's face,
And as she lifted up her eyes
All air was rife with harmonies;
And filled with solemn awe was he—
But was he dreaming?—could it be?

XLVII.

Oh, yes! 'twas Amethysta's self!
There was no other face so fair:
He knew her by her eyes of light,
He knew her by her long fair hair,
He knew her by her heavenly smile,
And trembled with excess of joy;
For there she stood, with arms outstretched
Towards him, lovingly, yet coy.

THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE.

Smiles chased the tears upon her face,—
He fell into her warm embrace ;
While she, supported on his breast,
With sighs her love, with sobs her joy expressed.

XLVIII.

And it was long ere either spake ;
For speech is slow to tell
The deeper feelings of the heart,
But silence preaches well.
And when at last their love and joy
Found vent in language, 'twas one word—
She “ Amethysta ! ” “ Gilbert ! ” he—
The only accents either heard.

XLIX.

“ And was it thou ? ” he said at last ;
“ Wert thou that woman old,
Whose pity from my suffering heart
The tide of anguish rolled ?
Sole friend when all the world denied—
Sole light when all was dark beside—
Sole comfort in excess of ill,
In pain and sorrow loving still,—
And was it thou ?—dull sense of mine !
Not to have known thee, maid divine !
Not, in all trials, to have known
That thou wert true, and thou alone ! ”

THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE.

L.

Her smile betrayed the long disguise,
And love celestial filled her eyes,
As she replied,—“Thou, Gilbert, too!
Thou in all sorrow—thou wert true!
For me thou borest grief untold,
Hunger and misery and cold;
For love of me, in this dull cave
Thou wert a menial and a slave:
My name in nightly visions hung,
Struggling for utterance, on thy tongue;
Oft in thy slumbers have I heard
Thy pallid lips repeat the word:
’Mid sorrow has thy love been tried,
Now has thy soul been purified!”

LI.

“Mine own beloved, rest upon this heart,
Whence thy dear image never shall depart;
True to ourselves, the miseries of yore
Never, oh, never, shall divide us more!
Gilbert will bless thee with his latest breath,
And love shall conquer e’en the pangs of death:
In that last hour his prayer to Heaven shall be
A hope of love in realms of bliss with thee!”

LII.

Her flushing cheek and tender eyes
Half hidden in his breast,

She thanked him with responsive sighs,
And all her love confessed.
Then lifting up her radiant face,
She clasped her hands and prayed,—
“ This is the crown of human joy,
Now my reward is paid ;
My happy soul shall never die—
Love gives it Immortality !”

LIII.

There seemed a chorus in the air
Of a thousand voices fair,
Softly singing every one :—
“ Now her day of grief is done ;
Her happy soul shall never die—
Love gives it Immortality !”

LIV.

The cave seemed full of spirits bright,
All floating in the ruddy light ;
And Porphyr—well he knew his name,
Spirit of vengeance, soul of flame—
Stood with the rest, serene and tall,
Proud and supreme above them all,
And stretched his hands towards the pair,
Blessed them, and melted into air ;
And with him vanished all the rest :
The flames sent forth a feebler ray,
The fire burnt low upon the hearth,
And the soft music died away.

LV.

“ Give me thy hand,” with gentle voice she said ;
“ From this glad hour my soul is all thine own ;
No more of kindred with those spirits fled—
I am a woman, bound to thee alone :
Old age and death, and penury and woe,
Whatever ills mankind are doomed to know,
I will endure, and never once repine,
But bless my happy lot if linked to thine.”

LVI.

He took her hand :—“ Now let us forth,” he said ;
“ The world is ours to choose our own abode,
And bounteous Nature hath a banquet spread
For loving hearts that put their trust in God :
Forth let us go !”—He clasped her to his breast ;—
Then hand in hand they left the darksome cell,
To find some spot where Peace might be a guest,
And build a bower where Happiness might dwell.

LVII.

And were they happy ? Old traditions say
The maiden perished on her bridal day ;
Slain by excess of rapturous joy, she fell
Lifeless upon the breast she loved so well.
And what his fate ? The legend tells it not.
Love is a light that cheers the darkest lot ;
His love was true, and lived beyond the tomb,
A flower of beauty in perpetual bloom ;

THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE.

With steadfast faith that sin may be forgiven,
And love like this to be renewed in heaven:
Poor is the heart adversity can break,
And loss is gain for Love and Pity's sake.

